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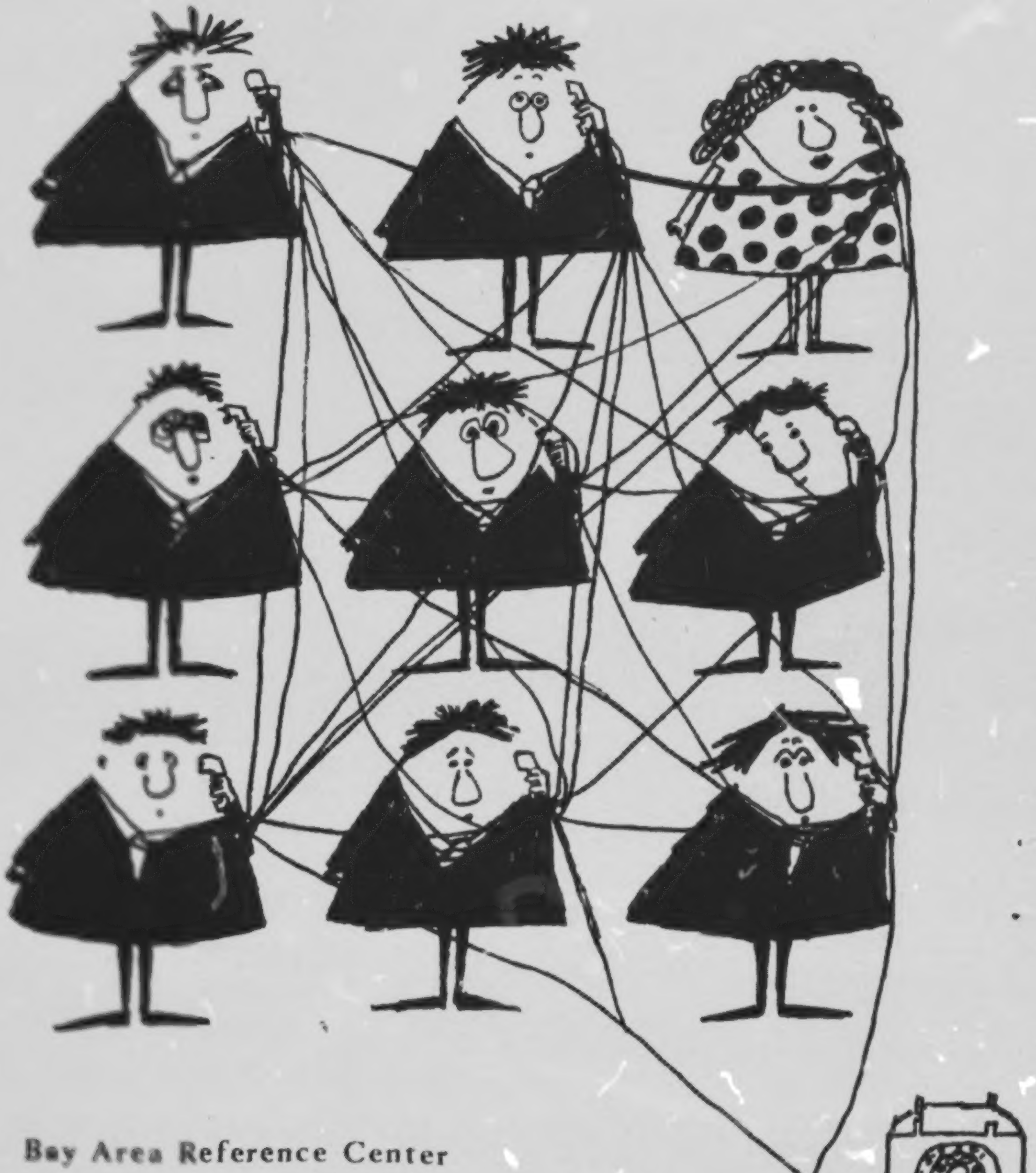
ABSTRACT

In a two-day workshop at the San Francisco Public Library, the staff of the Bay Area Reference Center (BARC) led discussions on how the library can serve as a community information and referral center. Various speakers reviewed the problems and possibilities of such a service and presented guidelines for the establishment, volunteer staffing, and evaluation of a community switchboard service. Several people who worked on local switchboards discussed the techniques which helped them to listen more creatively. The BARC staff enacted a role play that focused on the librarian's concerns over how much counseling is permissable. Librarians for the Peninsula Library System outlined the procedures they used to produce their community resources file, Inforama. The creators of the "Peoples Yellow Pages" answered questions on the development and marketing of this directory of alternative institutions and service agencies. This report is a transcript of the workshop discussions. (Author/SL)

ED 101 744

The Library as the

Community Switchboard



Bay Area Reference Center

IR 001 608

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Kit Materials

Background Readings - compiled by Peggy O'Donnell, BARC

A Community Resource File - compiled by Peggy O'Donnell

A Library Switchboard - compiled by Peggy O'Donnell

Police Community Service Directory - from "Compiling a Police Social Service Directory," by Jack E. Whitehouse, *Law and Order* Magazine, March 1972, pp. 48-58.

Sample Questions - taken from an HEW Information and Referring Service Training Syllabus

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BAY AREA REFERENCE CENTER
Presents
THE LIBRARY AS THE COMMUNITY SWITCHBOARD
Exhibit Room, 1st Floor
San Francisco Public Library
Larkin at McAllister (Civic Center)
San Francisco, California
Wednesday & Thursday, February 14 & 15, 1973

Wednesday, February 14, 1973

Participants

Peggy O'Donnell, Workshop Coordinator
Karen Jemison, Community Resources Inventory, Peninsula Library System
Anne Kincaid, Coordinator of Adult Services, SFPL
Dodie King, Redwood City Public Library and Volunteer, Project Outreach Switchboard
Gil McNamee, Director, Bay Area Reference Center
Regina Minudri, Alameda County Library
Georgia Mulligan, Director, Community Resources Inventory, Peninsula Library System

Program

9:00--9:30	Registration & Coffee, Exhibit Room, 1st Floor, Main Library
9:30-10:00	Introduction: An Overview of Information and Referral Service - Ms. O'Donnell
10:00-10:45	Two Reports on the State of the Art in Libraries - Ms. Kincaid and Mr. McNamee
10:45-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Compiling a Community Resource File - Ms. Mulligan and Ms. Jemison
12:00--1:30	Lunch
1:30--2:00	Tell Me Who Can Help--Role Playing with the BARC Staff
2:00--2:45	Volunteering on a Switchboard - Ms. King
2:45--3:30	How To Evaluate Information and Referral Service - Ms. Minudri

Thursday, February 15, 1973

Participants

Peggy O'Donnell, Workshop Coordinator
Fay Blake, Lecturer, School of Library Science, Berkeley, University of California
John Calkins, Director, Whole Earth Switchboard, San Carlos
Gordon McShean, Head of Program Development, Stanislaus County Free Library
Liz Schonberg, Director, Project Outreach Switchboard, Redwood City
Members of the *People's Yellow Pages* Collective

Program

9:00--9:30	Registration & Coffee, Exhibit Room, 1st Floor, Main Library
9:30-10:00	Introduction: An Overview of Information and Referral Service - Ms. O'Donnell
10:00-11:00	Switchboards Listen - Mr. Calkins and Ms. Schonberg
11:00-11:15	Break
11:15-11:45	Are Librarians Trained To Be Community Information Specialists? - Ms. Blake
11:45-12:15	Tell Me Who Can Help--Role Playing with the BARC Staff
12:15--2:00	Lunch
2:00--2:45	A Switchboard Model for the Public Library - Mr. McShean
2:45--3:30	Compiling a Directory of Alternatives - Members of the *People's Yellow Pages* Collective

Please notify BARC (558-2941) by February 13 if you plan to attend.

SUMMARY

This proved to be one of BARC's most popular workshops, and the number of calls we received after the workshop indicated that several librarians around the Bay Area were planning some form of community information file for their patrons.

The program was divided between discussion on how to compile a community information file and how to encourage librarians to be more aware of the kinds of problems they can help solve by careful listening to their patrons' requests. The solutions usually involve a referral to an agency that works in the appropriate area.

Several people who work on switchboards in the area discussed the techniques they use to help them listen more creatively. The BARC staff enacted a role play that focused on librarian concerns on just how much counselling we can do. Georgia Mulligan and Karen Jemison outlined the procedures they used to produce the Peninsula Library System community file, Inforama. Members of the People's Yellow Pages were invited to explain how their unique resource came into being. Unfortunately, the speaker for the People's Yellow Pages, Shirley Lustig, was delayed, and since this portion was at the end of the day, many of the audience left before her arrival. Those that remained were treated to a lively commentary on how five women set about culling the information that has made the People's Yellow Pages such a bestseller. It's certainly in constant use in the BARC office.

Bay Area SRRT reported on a survey it had done to test the responsiveness of several libraries in the area to community information questions. The full report on this survey and the community resource file headings prepared for the workshop have been published in Synergy #41 for those of you who may have missed the workshop.

INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Peggy O'Donnell

Good morning. Welcome to the workshop. I'd like to begin this morning by thanking Georgia Mulligan for her help with this workshop. She shared her information with me and with you. So she was a great help to me, and she put me onto many of the speakers we have today. I'd also like to thank the BARC staff, because as always they helped, and a little later they'll help out by a little role playing, and I appreciate their assistance.

In your kits there is a list of "Background Readings." There really isn't a great deal. It's not the kind of subject on which you do a tremendous amount of academic research into the literature, but there are some good readings, and I think most of the titles listed would be very useful to anyone working on a network of information or a neighborhood information center.

One of the items is by Lorraine Johnson. It's a "Descriptive Survey of Switchboards in the San Mateo Area," and it's her thesis for library school, and it's not published, but it's really very useful, especially for those people in the San Mateo area who might want to have access to it. At the present time BARC has a copy which we can make available to you. At this time that's the only way you can get hold of Lorraine's thesis.

Now, I included on this brightly colored sheet sample questions that I took from a training syllabus from HEW Information Control Services. I don't think people spend much time looking at the kit during the workshop, and that's just fine, but maybe during the break, or at lunch, or sometime, you would maybe just glance over this and think, if you were back in the library, could you answer all these questions. I don't expect you to know off the top of your head where to go to adopt a baby, but do you know the agencies? Do you know where in a directory in your library you could look up and find the answers to all these questions? These are the kinds of things people want to know. A little later we'll be doing kind of a role playing oepration, and I would like to have your comments, and I think the questions might help you when we get into that.

Our topic this morning is one about which there's a great deal of interest. I think that's shown by the fact that we have so many people here this morning. It's a difficult one to get hold of. Libraries have always been community information centers, in a sense, but organizing the information can be a terrible problem. But it's not just libraries; very few people can handle the proliferation of information services and agencies that exist even in a modest size community.

As I was preparing for this workshop, I was beginning to collect what I call sad cases about people who had a problem, and they went from agency to agency without getting an answer. It was a very interesting thing, because I think a lot of librarians think that a good information center is needed for poor areas, since people there don't have access to information. Well, in every one of these sad cases, the people who were trying to get the information were middle class, professional, aggressive, were screaming and yelling and getting transferred, but they never got the information. This points out that few people, if they come up against bureaucracy, seem to be able to get the answer.

As an example of this, I'd like to share one of the sad cases with you. It's a true story. It's from a Minneapolis Star column. Basically the story was of a minister who happened to be in court, and he met a poor Indian woman there who was going to be sent to the workhouse for a vagrancy charge. He managed to get the charge dropped, but the judge said she'd have to have the fare to Chicago and clothes, a minor sum, really not very much money. So the Reverend Father decided that he would go and see what official agency would help him. He first called the Council of Churches in Minnesota which referred him to the Department of Indian Works. He called them, and they said they didn't do that kind of work, and they suggested the American Indian Center. He called the American Indian Center and was told they could not help, but they suggested the next 2 agencies--the American Indian Movement, who sent him to the Indian Citizens Community Center. We're now on our fifth agency. They couldn't help, so he called Traveler's Aid. They referred him to the Relief Office of Bloomington. He called the Relief Office. They were completely baffled and suggested that he call the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He called the Bureau of Indian Affairs who referred him to the Midwest Indian Center. He called the Midwest Indian Center. They were the first to realize that there was a person and not just a question involved. They said they'd like to help, but that they really didn't feel it fell within their agency, so they referred him to the Catholic Welfare Services. Catholic Welfare Services was humane, and they said they'd have to check around, and if they couldn't find anyone else to help, maybe they could help out. Then he called the Social Service Information Referral and was given 2 of the agencies that he had already checked. He called the Bloomington Human Relations Commission and was referred to the Health Services. At this point, he gave the lady the money she needed to get to Chicago. This is an extreme example, but a true one. Here was a man determined to find help for this woman, and after checking out 11 or 12 agencies, he still had no help, so he helped her himself.

Information Services is not a new service in the community or in this country. There have been forms of information and referral services since the 1870's, first run by Social Services Exchange. The purpose of the Social Services Exchange in the 1870's was to keep track of people on relief to make sure they didn't get too much relief. If they were getting it from this church, they weren't going to get it from the government office. This evolved into a more humane kind of operation and then became a kind of center, a clearinghouse to coordinate all kinds of welfare and social services in the community. During the 2nd World War, we had some community advisory centers, and they were related mainly to the veterans' problems, and once the veterans had returned and settled down, they all closed by 1959. We've had public health information centers to keep track mainly of the chronically ill--arthritis, or for the blind where they have services available in the community: United funds, Easter Seal Society, Administration on Aging, churches, labor unions, OEO--all of them have made attempts in this area of information and referral. Unfortunately, too often they just take care of their own agency and services, and they don't attempt to pull together all the information in a community; and if they aren't the right agency, they'll just transfer you somewhere else, because they don't really know what's going on.

The last 15 years have really shown a tremendous growth in this kind of thing. There is one information center I thought might be very helpful in San Diego. As you probably know, the federal government has an information center in the major cities like San Francisco, and if you call them they'll try to get you to the right federal agency. That's nice, but in San Diego they found that most people can't figure out which agency--the city, the state, or the feds--are the ones you want. So they have an information center that covers all types of government, and they try to refer a person with a problem to the government agency that will be helpful. There, again, it's limited. It's just government agencies. It's not private. It's not special alternatives. It's just government, and that's big enough. That's the best example I found.

Some of you may be familiar with the British Citizens Advice Bureau. They seem to be the most successful volunteer citizens organization for getting information. It was also started in the 2nd World War. They have local control, even though they have a kind of semi-official national board. The emphasis is citizens helping citizens, and it is volunteer, though there's some money. It's usually local money, and they do a great deal of counselling and advice. This brings up a problem for libraries. Librarians say, "Well, fine; I'll give them the address of an agency, but it's not my business to advise someone if they have a problem. I'll give them an agency instead of maybe trying to interview and find out, is this the problem, and maybe these 3 agencies are the best." We don't want to get into that too much, but the British Advice Bureau does do a great deal. Gordon McShean will be here tomorrow. Those of you who will be here tomorrow will hear his report. He just came back from New Zealand where they also have these advice bureaus. This book, which is on your list, Neighborhood Information Centers, is very good for their work.

The main purpose of the CAB's, the Citizens Advice Bureaus, includes information, advice, steering, counselling, referral, feedback and advocacy. Advocacy, I'm sure, in many cases, libraries feel they can't get into, but this is a very important part of this kind of service. The attempt to reach all people, and they give a wide range of information. They're confidential and non-partisan. There was an interesting breakdown in this book of the type of information needs, if you're wondering what type people want to know, and the main thing was family and personal, and that's all kinds of marital and counselling problems, as well as welfare and relief problems. The next was property and land, tenants' rights, and that kind of information. This is a good breakdown of the things people ask about.

There is another organization in England. Some of you may know about the Samaratins, and they handle the crises, the suicides and drug problems, and they're sort of a counterbalance to the advice bureaus. In this country we have seen a great growth in the last few years of this kind of the switchboard concept--in crisis situations, sometimes in just giving information of alternatives. Obviously these grew up because of the great lack of information generally available in communities, and more of them appear each day. Some of you may have read Carolyn Forsman's article in Library Journal, and she goes into that a great deal. I think it's a very good article. Libraries, as I said, have always been more or less in the community information business.

I'm reminded of a story I read in one of these reports about the library director who at a meeting to plan a community network said, "Well, my library has always been in the community information business. Look at the lobby. There's a community bulletin board." So unfortunately, sort of half tokenism is too often our idea of community service.

I found 2 really interesting books when I was preparing for this. They're both Allerton Park studies from the University of Illinois Library School. One was written in '57 and one in '72. One is "Community Information Center," and one is "Neighborhood Information Center in Libraries," the whole concept, and this is what they were saying. It's very important that you give your community information. Who is the community? There is the business community and the labor community, an offshoot of the business community. There is the government, the civic groups. These people should be given information. Then it goes on--the library should provide information on "wholesome recreation and constructive use of time." In other words, that's what is called community information, but there is nothing about any kind of emergency needs, gut issues. The whole emphasis is on good reference services within the library, being able to look up in the right directory, and service that's traditional middle class, middle education, everything. It absolutely has no concept of what we think of as community information centers. Most of the book is devoted to good reference books in backing up your community information center. As I said, this was written in '57, and they do bring out one very important point that I think libraries, when they do get into this, often neglect to do, and that's publicizing. They really make a strong plea for publicizing that the library is a source of community information. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the community information they would have pulled together would have had little use, but they do push that point that you should publicize it.

In 1972 it's a whole new book. The whole emphasis here is on what we have come to think of as community information--going out into the community, asking people in the community what they need to know, locating people in the community who have information, locating agencies. It's a selection of papers from an institute, and so it ranges from those who will say the library should be an advocate if they see there is a need, to those who say the library should take a more passive role, but at least should provide the information. It's really very interesting for anyone planning this sort of service. I would recommend it. They also outline the projects that are in existence around the country right now. Gil will be mentioning what he found out about these projects, so I'll just mention some of the things that are going on in other communities.

There's a project in Elyria, Ohio; a Model Cities community in Philadelphia--there they use computers in collecting this kind of information; the Detroit Public Library. Several libraries in the East and Midwest are getting into it. I couldn't find anything on any West Coast library that has gotten into it so completely as these projects.

I also found an interesting study, because the question often comes up, "Well, what do people want to know?" You can do this background research and read these reports and find out what some people have found out that people want to know, but the question comes up, "Well, do we really know what they want to know? Do we really talk to our public?" This book, which looks awful and has a terrible title, is really great. It's The Disadvantaged and Library Effectiveness, and it's written by a planning officer of HEW, and her job was to evaluate quite a few community library programs that had received federal funds, and to go out and see if they provided what they were supposed to. She got some really interesting case studies ranging all the way from the professional librarians who have the expertise, but who have no contact in the community, and so no one comes to the library, to the people who have wonderful communications in the community. The people all love them. They come by and talk to them, but when they need the information, the staff didn't have the expertise to find the information. That's sort of the 2 extremes, but it's good.

One thing I thought was most important: They surveyed--these areas are all poor urban areas--and they surveyed the users of the library: the non-users in the neighborhoods around, and the civic leaders, which happened to include librarians. That may be the first time we made the civic leaders; anyway, among the users, they found that the greatest thing the users wanted--in most cases, in the poor areas, since they were taking courses, adult classes, or trying to get into schools, or get jobs--was educational back-up material first, then information on jobs and discrimination in housing. The people who did not use the library, and that was a much larger group, when they became aware that the library was there, and they were asked, "What would you use the library for?", they wanted survival issues--food stamps, welfare, unemployment, things like that, legal aid, and they felt that was the most important thing that libraries could provide. That was even more important to them than to the users. The civic leaders, however, overwhelmingly voted for teaching and educational and a passive role. In other words, you could host classes in the library, and you could provide materials; but the library as an exchange for information to the community--most people felt that the library was so ineffective in these areas, so unknown, that nobody would go there anyway, so why bother to have the information in the library. The librarians didn't feel like that among the civic leaders, but the civic leaders did. The librarians felt they should be an information center, but unfortunately didn't know how to get it together, so they didn't do anything about it. The study pretty much showed that there really was no attempt, even in libraries where they felt this was a really important service, there was very little attempt to provide this service. This is a very good book, and in these days when federal projects are falling right and left, we may never see their like again, but if we do, it would be kind of useful to anyone in planning a service, in seeing the cases, in seeing how these services go wrong. They also brought out, again, the problem of publicizing a service. It was not done in so many cases. When there was really fine materials, service, and information at a branch, they did very little to get the word out to the community. That's really unfortunate.

As I mentioned, some of the libraries have been involved in this. I have an article here from Detroit, on their kind of civic information. They seemed to perform almost an advocate role, at least reading the newspaper article, which is all I have to go by. There is a Neighborhood Information Center project, which includes Cleveland, Atlanta, Detroit, Houston, and Queensborough, New York. They have a big federal grant to organize, plan, figure out how information in a major city should work, and then they'll have test projects, I guess, if they don't lose their money.

Gil, who has recently been in New York and Washington, checked out some of these places, because when you read the literature, and I'm sure we've done it in BARC, it always sounds like everything is pie in the sky, and that there are no problems, and that we sure did it good; but too often, when you get close to it and analyze it, there are errors, and there are problems, and it's not quite as marvelous as it sounds. Gil will have a report on it for you just a little bit later.

Before we turn it over to the speakers, I should say that we have many people who are qualified to discuss how one goes about it, if one is convinced that one needs an information center, how you go about it, how you organize it; but there are just a few things I would like to point out. The first thing you sort of have to do if you're going to arrange this kind of information center is to determine what people want to know, the users and the non-users. This involves not only reading, organizing and thinking about it, but actually talking to people and asking them what they want to know. It involves community contact that simply can't be done behind a desk. There is enough to do behind the desk, even with a project such as this, but the first thing is to see not only what the citizens want, but what other agencies are doing. You may find this super referral service in your area, and there's no point in your doing it. All you have to do is refer everyone; but unless you get in contact with various members of your community, you won't know this. Then you can inventory your community if the need is there, locating the resources, finding what kinds of services these various resources provide. Again, the personal contact in talking to people, and I'm sure you all know this is important. If you get turned off at an agency, and at a similar agency that deals with health, you get a very good reaction, and you get a sympathetic person, I think you know automatically that you'll send people to the good agency, because you know the people there care and are interested.

A big problem with this kind of file is organizing this kind of information when you get it. I find that the most difficult problem. Maybe I'm not very good at classification, but I tend to want to have everything organized under the word people think of and not some nice LC heading that I never could think of. One nice thing, if you have an information file, would be to make it accessible to the public. I'll be showing you examples in a minute of what I mean. Obviously if you get on a heavy library trip with an involved kind of heading, nobody is going to be able to use it except you, which is guarding your position nicely, but I feel like you really ought to make it more available, so I think in organizing this ease of format is vital.

I should mention that other libraries, like in Philadelphia and other places, Enoch Pratt, are computerizing and giving out directories of information. There you not only need to know how to be a librarian and the jargon, you have to have the terminology for the computer print-out. This is fine if you have just a lovely professional staff behind there who can instantly pick it up, but I don't see that this is tremendously valuable to the average person. So this is a problem that comes up, though maybe if you have the right situation, the computer and the special terminology is the answer.

Once you get this wonderful file, and it is accessible, and you can use it, I think there is something--this is my opinion, and you're certainly free to disagree--I think we have to make a much greater effort to interview patrons. I'm not just talking about a reference interview, which BARC has talked about many times, but this is a very sensitive area, when you're talking about people who have problems, and you sometimes have to become more involved in this interview. A lot of people don't want to be involved, so they cut it off; but I think if you want this to work, it's very important that you listen, and try to find out what the real needs are, and to steer the person to the best source for them, not just a general source that might be good for a lot of people.

Another important thing, and I think libraries maybe fall down on this more than anything else, is to encourage the patron to come back if he doesn't get the information. Really encourage him to come back. Say, "I'm going to send you over here; I'm giving you this phone number, and listen; if it doesn't work, please call us back." One of these centers that I was studying for this project has a 3-way referral phone. When you call, the librarian interviews and decides what agency seems to be the best, calls the agency, and then there's a 3-way conversation. If the librarian decides that the patron isn't going to get help from this agency, either because of attitude, or it just isn't the right place, she cuts the call, and then she sends him to another agency, all the time maintaining on the phone that contact so she doesn't have to transfer people again and again. I'm sure that is the most disheartening experience, being transferred constantly when you have a terrible problem. It's really horrible when all you want to know is the definition of a word and you get 4 different departments; but if you have a problem and feel that nobody's going to help you, and you get 3 departments, and you think that nobody cares--what do you do at that point? You don't call the library, I guess.

Finally, again here I am with publicity, which is my great love, public relations. It's not just because it's my great love. It's that there's no point in doing this unless you make it known, and not on the library bulletin board. This is no good to the non-user of the library. People who need this information are those who really have to have it told over the radio or in the paper that this information is available.

I've prepared some booklists, some subject lists in your kit. We're not really going to run through them, but I hope they might be useful. The most important thing about doing this kind of thing is that it's local. It's your community, your needs and your agencies; but I thought maybe some guidelines might help. In organizing your community file, there is a very useful list on surveying the community, and then there's just some sources I thought might be useful--the Yellow Pages. One thing I think is really interesting, if you can find it out, is if your area has a directory of welfare, social and religious agencies. This one is from San Jose, also East Palo Alto, and I've seen them from various communities, and they're really very useful for this kind of information. It might be in your social welfare department. It might be published by a religious organization, but this is a project that people take on, compiling these directories.

Government agencies: This one, OEO Service to Older Adults, may no longer exist, but this is a regional directory to all the projects that were in existence a few months back in the Western Region states. This one is very useful for locating in your area what kinds of particular projects there were for older adults.

The newspapers, of course, the shopper news--we think the Progress is a fantastic source for all kinds of information in San Francisco. The underground is an important source. All underground papers have many alternative addresses and information.

Calendars: I'm sure you receive all kinds of calendars at your library. This is the one on films in the Bay Area. This is not only useful because you can put it up and people know what's happening, but it gives you the addresses of agencies that are doing this kind of thing, if you want to have a good resource file on recreation, entertainment, or whatever in your community. BARC has done several, for those of you who have been coming to our workshops for several years now. We did one on health. We did one on drug clinics. We've done one on planning. These kinds of community sources for either Northern California or the Bay Area can be very useful to you too.

Now, once you've kind of organized it, as I say, got the information, you want to put it together. I put 2 lists in your kit. The first one is the "Police Community Service Directory," and I got this from Law and Order. It was really a good article. The man who wrote it said that policemen are concerned with between 80% and 90% of their time with people with problems, not with criminals, not with chasing criminals, not with stopping crime, but simply helping people, or being asked to help people who have problems. So his idea was that every policeman should carry a directory for his community, and he put together what he thought were the most important services that people should know about for their community. So this is what I call more of an emergency, sort of survival list. If you didn't have the time to do a complete list, this might be the kind of thing to do. If your town has all these various agencies, if you have the name, address and phone number, I think it could be a very useful thing to keep by the desk.

If you're really going to get into it, you might want to go to the Community Resource File, which I compiled by pulling together all The Yellow Pages and directories that I could find, and stealing their headings. Anyway, it would be just a guideline, and obviously, you might not have anyone in your community that was into zen, but if you do, this would be kind of a way of arranging it. So I owe all those other directories a thanks, because I did sort of pull together the kind of information you might be asked for. Every now and then I fell down, and I used a library kind of heading, but I tried to use easy ones that people would ask for.

When you've got your headings and your information and your addresses, and you've made some kind of arrangement about updating, either by calling, or mailing, or checking to see if the information is current, how do you arrange it? Well, I mentioned the computer, which is one way that it has been done, if you can afford a computer; but we have several other examples. Georgia Mulligan will be talking about her list. It's a looseleaf, and you, of course, can add to it or change things as you need to. That's one way of doing it. We have a Rolodex in the General Reference Department here with a back-up tub file. You could use a Cardex, and catalog card drawer. I think it's very important that it be out where the public can see it. Maybe you could have 2 copies--one for the public and another for your phone reference.

The one I like the best--I just think it's neat--this is done by Marcia Keller for San Mateo County, and it's just a thing with cards. You could hang it on the desk and go through, and whatever your problem, or if you just wanted to take a course in cooking or macrame, you just go through it and find whatever it is that turns you on. Is Marcia here? You are. Would you like to say something about this?

Marcia Keller

No, just look at it, I guess.

Ms. O'Donnell

I understand it was too expensive to keep up, though you had them in all the branches.

Ms. Keller

We did about 75 when we ran it off. Figuring employee time and all that, I think it ran about $2 a pack. Simply to reproduce from there, it would be cheaper at this point. We put it in all our libraries. 2 or 3 copies at the reference desk, public and catalog drawers. Then they did get to some city editors and switchboard people out in the community, but we had a big plan, and we weren't really able to supply what we wanted to.

Ms. O'Donnell

I thought it was really great, and I did want to bring it to people's attention.

I've just been trying to give you some ideas. We'll have other speakers who will have more information to give you on how to put these things together. We'll have Georgia talking about how she compiled her community list. We have Dodie King here who is a switchboard volunteer. She can get into that creative listening and counselling as opposed to just giving reference.

Before we get to that, we have Gil McNamee. As I said, he's just returned from a nationwide tour--Washington, the Congress, the President, none of whom saw him, but keep trying, Gil. His assignment, as I said, was to check out the various agencies or libraries that I knew of that had these special neighborhood information centers, community information centers, switchboards, what-have-you, and to find out what they were doing; and I think he has a report that will at least give us insight into some of the things that are going on back East. Gil.

TWO REPORTS ON THE STATE OF THE ART IN LIBRARIES

Gil McNamee and Anne Kincaid

Mr. McNamee

In some cases, I think Peggy has already told just about all I know about them, but before I start, I would like to introduce my counterpart from Southern California. We have Evelyn Greenwald who is in charge of SCAN, Southern California Answering Network, Los Angeles. We also have somebody here who is in charge of METRO in Southern California, Cecily Surace. This workshop seems to be pulling them in from far and wide.

As you probably realize, as time goes by in the next two days, when we talk about neighborhood information centers we're treading on rather virgin territory. However, it seems that back East they are doing probably more than we are here in the West, which is unusual, I think. Many of the librarians I met at ALA, and also those in Washington, felt that the future of the public library is going to rest on the public library's involvement in community centers, and that if librarians don't come around to the providing of this kind of information, that there's not going to be anything left for librarians to do.

First of all, perhaps right now, the most important project of this type is the one that Peggy mentioned, the Neighborhood Information Center project that was awarded to the Cleveland Public Library. It's the first federal funding that I know awarded to a consortium of public libraries. She mentioned the cities. I'll mention them again: Atlanta, Cleveland, Houston, Detroit, and Queensborough. The first year, which began in July of last year, has been spent in implementation. The actual neighborhood project started last month. I think the important thing about the project is that it is to be a prototype, and I'm sure that you're going to be seeing an awful lot in the literature about this particular program. Some of you are familiar with Dorothy Turick, who was formerly our Assistant Executive Director of the California Library Association. She wrote the proposal. Right now there's nothing else that I can report on, because nothing else seems to have been done; but they did get $324,000, and it is interesting that a proposal like this would go to public libraries without that intermediate step of the State Library. They have so far issued a brochure, which is just merely a list of the people who are involved and the libraries that are involved. Just this morning in the mail, Dorothy did send me a copy of the proposal that was written, and I haven't really had time to go through it, but it looks very interesting, and some of you who are interested in proposal writing might want to look at this, because it is unique.

When I started off for Washington, Peggy gave me several leads about projects that she had heard about. One of these was in New York. It's called the Citizens Information Resource Agency. It's another federal project and operates out of the office of the mayor. It's another one that hasn't really gotten off the ground yet, and nothing really to report. However, I talked to the office of the Mayor, and they will have a press release and something out about the project between March 1 and March 15. If anyone is interested in receiving any more information about this particular project, which will be computerized, (and I believe will deliver the information in microfiche form), the man to address is Mr. Phillip Finklestein in the office of the Mayor. If anyone wants his complete address, you can get it from me.

Peggy also had some information about a service that was sponsored by the District of Columbia government. It's called Information and Referral Service and operates through the District's Health Service. Unfortunately, this one only operates from 8:00 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. The Office of Public Affairs of the District of Columbia also publishes a very valuable booklet. It's called "For Your Information." (Shows to audience.) This is the sort of thing I wish our city would publish, and I don't know whether all of your cities publish something like this or not, but it is a fairly good subject index. A few of the things they miss out on. For instance, you'll find abortion under Family Planning. You will find information in here like what to do with dead animals, how to make a will and where to file it, how much it costs, addresses, phone numbers, and all this sort of thing, and a fairly good subject index.

The District of Columbia Public Library is distributing this for the D.C. government, which indicates there is more cooperation between municipal agencies than we have here.

One thing I'd like to point out is that they have in the new library a Department called Washingtoniana. Now, all of us have California sections, and San Francisco sections, and so forth, but, generally, we think of it as local history. They do not think of it that way in the District. They are dealing with such things as the Codes, everything that the District government puts out - the Social Register, etc. It is a very active department. The public library, as I say, distributes it, but only the people who come to the public library would get a copy.

The Library of the District of Columbia also distributes something called a Complaint and Information Directory, (holds up) and it's from the City Hall Complaint Center. It was reproduced by the City Hall, and the library just merely distributes it. Some of the subject headings in here are ridiculous. For instance, if you wanted to know how to move a car that has been sitting on the road for a long time, you would have to look up "Abandoned Vehicle"-nothing under "Vehicle", nothing under "Cars." A heading called "Bulky Items", which means where to have a refrigerator or a mattress picked up. It gives you where to call, the address, and so forth. If you have a burned out streetlight, you do not look under "light." You look under "Burned Out Light." It's better than nothing. It's nice and compact, and there is a lot of good information in it.

Now, there is also in Washington a non-government service called the Health and Welfare Council. It is also a referral center. It also operates 9-5, Monday through Friday, and I point out that again, because so many of these agencies and these referral centers have limited daytime service, and this is where the library can be a very important item, because we are open more hours. The Health and Welfare Council, however, has employed the use of the Salvation Army and the Traveler's Aid Society to take those calls in the off-hours, so that does offer service in the night hours and Saturdays and Sundays. They issue something called Where To Turn,(indicates copy), a new issue coming out in 1973; and an important item to point out here is that librarians will be doing the subject headings. It shows nice cooperation between city agencies which I like to see.

This type of cooperation was very apparent in the formation of the Referral Center at the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore. This Referral Center in Baltimore seems to have gotten more publicity than any of the others. The Center is in the main library, but there are no signs pointing to it, and there seems to be not enough publicity about it that would reach the people who should have the knowledge that it's there. They have organized it very well, and as Peggy has pointed out, the card files are done well. They do theirs on 5 x 8 cards, using the Battelle Numbering System. I like the looseleaf notebook idea myself, because that way, you can pull out something and still keep it in alphabetical order if you want to. The numbering system means that once you've found a new agency who supplies something, you can just give it the next number. Then, in addition to that, there is a card file listing their services. In the agency list you will find such things as the contact person, who to see, is there a fee, what hours they're open, what bus line goes there, is there an age limit--all of this type of information is contained on that one card. Any limits of service would also be there, because some services are designed for the over-65, and that sort of thing. The subject headings for Enoch Pratt were done by the University of Maryland School of Library and Information Services. I don't know whether we can get that ourselves if we might want it. We could try; the District of Columbia got a copy for their project which is in the making now.

While in Washington, I broke my glasses, and on the way to have them fixed, I came across a branch library of the District of Columbia; it's in the Cleveland Park Area, and I wondered what they did for the community. I went in and asked if they had some sort of a switchboard service, and she got back behind the desk and got out the old Princeton file with the old yellow directories and so forth, and that seemed to be about all they had, except that they did have a table provided which offered many community brochures. The agencies, etc., in the community come in and keep the table supplied with handouts for people. Some interesting handouts--one on sickle cell anemia; one in Spanish on VD; one proud heritage on the black literature; and one which I find of interest to answer a question for BARC, and it's a brochure by George Washington on Continuing Education for Women. BARC has had a question--"Is there any college which gives a masters degree in women's studies?" I just happened to pick this up and bring it back, and it does list a masters degree offered in women's studies at GWU.

I thought to myself while there, "Surely the new Martin Luther King Library would be doing something along this line," so I went there, got a map of the library, and I noticed that it listed the Community Service Office on the fourth floor. Unfortunately, it was on a Saturday. Well, Saturday was the wrong time to go, because there was no one there, so I had to go back later. I went back the following week to the Community Service Section. The man who was in charge was gone that day, and the woman who was there in his place knew absolutely nothing about it. So I thought, "Well, surely they must be doing some switchboard activities; I'll go to General Reference." Now, the new Martin King Library was designed by Mies Van der Rohe and I'm afraid it leaves something to be desired as far as I'm concerned. I don't think I could work there. It's awfully big. It's four floors--not much color. It's difficult to get around in. The elevators didn't seem to work. The stairways were marked, "No Admittance." I knew that they had a General Reference Department, so I went all the way back down to the first floor. There was a young man on the phone behind the desk, griping to someone else in the library, because she had sent him a book review, and he was too busy to read the book at the desk, and he would have to take it home and read it there and write out the book review at home. He didn't feel this was quite fair, and I'm standing there waiting for him to wait on me. Finally, he quit talking on the phone, so I asked him if the D.C. Public Library was doing anything in switchboard activity at all, and he said, "Well, that sounds like Washingtoniana to me." So he sent me to the Washingtoniana Department. It's on the third floor, so back up again I go; and am I glad I went to the trouble! I asked a librarian by the name of Roxanna Hanson if they were doing any community work. She happened to be the chairperson of the group in Washington that is going to do exactly what we're talking about today. She had written a proposal, a nice, lengthy proposal, beautiful job, on how to compile your resources, and how to make the card files--everything. It still hasn't been approved by the administration as yet, but she has even figured out the financial part of it--how much time they will need, what sort of phone lines they will need, and so forth. (Holds up the D.C. Proposal.)

One of the things that's emphasized in here is staff training. Roxanna feels that sometimes librarians aren't the people to work at these desks, but she feels that librarians are necessary to compile all the information, to organize, to train, to keep it updated, and so forth. From then on, someone else can give out the information. In the staff training, she emphasizes the fact that the reason for the existence of these centers should be stressed. They should learn how to use the resource file. They should understand themselves. They should know how to interview, and they should listen! They should provide information, and they should refer people to the appropriate organization. It's an interesting proposal, and I do wish you'd look at it.

Peggy pointed out the Model Cities program in Philadelphia. I didn't get to visit Philadelphia. It is a computerized information referral, and they do have that 3-way phone service which Peggy was talking about. The District of Columbia is going to have that 3-way phone service too, because they discovered that many people get lost when they get to an agency, and if the librarian doesn't hang on and explain to the person while the other person is on the line, they might end up with the wrong person who would be no help. In other words, like I did, they might get an office that's not staffed properly that day.

There's an on-going project in Prince George's County, Maryland, a very good neighborhood project. It's in the Fairmont Heights Branch, which is about seven miles from the District of Columbia. Right now they're operating in very temporary quarters. The librarian there is named Betty Smith, and very much on the ball. She conducted a public service workshop for the branch librarians in the whole Prince George's County System there. She said it was interesting to her, when she was doing the workshop, to look out at the faces of the librarians and one could almost know which librarian could operate in the proper "switchboard" manner, and which could not. She emphasizes the fact that the service cannot be rigidly structured, that the librarian must be out into the community most of the time. She also emphasized the fact that you've just got to know how to listen!

I'd like to close by telling you about a publication. This publication is the first one on that forest-green list that you have. It's called Information and Referral Centers; a Functional Analysis. It is issued by the Administration on Aging. However, the material that's in here on referral centers for the aged can be used for any referral center. It is not a GPO item, but is available, and Peggy has the address in your kit. I found this document when I was talking to Roxanna Hanson. I realized that it was not a GPO item, and realized that I would have to go to the Administration on Aging to pick it up myself.

I went to the Administration on Aging in the rain to get a copy. I went to 330 Independence Avenue where the Health, Education and Welfare Office is. There are guards at the door. The guard pushed his head out and said, "What do you want? You can't get in here without a pass." I said, "All I want is a document." "Well, you have to go around the other way to get a pass." In Washington, nearly all government buildings are a block long, so this is quite a long walk in the rain. I went around to the other side and tried to get in. I couldn't. I had to go to 330 C Street. Having lived in Washington, I knew at one time you could go underground from one building to another, but not with the new security rules. More guards at this door also--3 guards - uniformed, and also 3 people in civilian clothes; one stopped me and said, "What do you want?' I said, "I want a document." They said, "Well, what room number do you have." I said, "I don't have a room number." "Do you have anybody's name?' "No, I don't." I think that if I hadn't really wanted this so badly, I would have given up! I was mad by this time. I can understand the CIA, or FBI, or NASA having all this security, but the Administration on Aging? Then I thought to myself, "Suppose I were over 65 and really needed some information from the Administration on Aging--I would absolutely give up; I would not be able to do it." I think that here, in the resource file, under Administration on Aging, I would put a note, "Heavily guarded," refer by phone first before sending one here.

Peggy O'Donnell

It really is sad about the Administration on Aging, and I can sympathize with him on his horrendous experience, but they do put out the best stuff for this kind of service, because they seem to put the most emphasis on information and referral services and how to do it. Again, on your list you'll find that they really are working drafts. They're just mimeographed things on training in referral and follow-up on handling this, and it's really good, and you can only get it by writing to the Administration on Aging. I guess if the mails get through, the guards let the letters in, so I would recommend--you know, they've done good work, if you can get to them.

As Gil said, it's very important, and it comes out over and over again in proposals, and when you talk to people that are involved in this, the training of the people who will handle the service, and there are various ways that this has been done, by getting people in the community to go out and locate the information sources, by having them answer the phones with a backup librarian staff, or by having it run by librarians. In the British Bureau that I mentioned, in the advice bureaus, very often the bureau is in the library, but it is not connected with the library. Some of them are strictly citizen. So all these combinations are possible.

When I was getting ready for this workshop, it was hard enough to get hold of the literature, because there wasn't really very much, and there wasn't that much in the library, and as I scurried around, I kept coming up with empty slots, and it wasn't there, and I thought, "Who in the heck wants to read this but me?" --like the typical library patron--you know, "I'm sure I'm the only one who wants to read that book." So then I find out that Anne Kincaid, who is our Coordiantor of Adult Services, is the one who has been ripping them off the shelf, and she finally called me to get something that I had managed to get before she did. The reason that she has this information collected together is because she had been invited to attend an institute in Atlanta, and the purpose of this institute, and I had high hopes of a great deal of information that she could bring back to us, was how library schools were meeting this need of training people to provide this kind of service, and special projects, and so on. So as soon as she got back I called her up and said, "Tell me everything," and I will now let her tell you everything....Anne.

Ms. Kincaid

This is a very sad and very short story on the state of the art in library schools. First of all, these calls come into public libraries, and we're asked to send representatives to one kind of conference and another. We received a call. The first call said that the Office of Education was having an institute on urban information centers in Atlanta, and they'd like a representative from San Francisco Public Library. Well, this sounded like something that we would be very interested in doing, and I volunteered to go, because this was something that I had been interested in pursuing. Well, the day before I left for the airport, I received an agenda for the meeting, and I found out that what I was going to was, "The annual program for library school faculty engaged in conducting federally sponsored institutes to train urban information specialists." There are approximately 8 schools in the country where this is being done. It's a 2-year program, and I was to serve as a non-participating public library observer. This was kind of dumbfounding to begin with.

When I got there I was even more disturbed to find out that they were going to spend the first day talking about how to improve communications within their institutes between faculty and students. This didn't seem very relevant to what we were interested in. Then the second two days were a series of goal-setting sessions and a management training institute in which they would decide how to evaluate the success of these institutes. So really, what you were able to learn about urban information had to come sort of at the cocktail parties in the evenings after the classes were over and at lunch, as people started expressing their frustrations, and you began to learn about each individual program and what it does consist of.

The first thing that I learned was that there was very little agreement as to what the academic requirements were, either for admission to one of these programs, or as to what the students should learn in the course of participating in a program of this nature. Many people began by trying to recruit minorities. There have been frustrations involved in this. If they geared up and stressed the urban information aspects of it, they found that many of the students were not interested in the library science component, and there seems to be a great deal of hand-holding going on in many of these institutes just to keep people actively engaged in the traditional part of the library school program.

The other place that there seems to be a great deal of disagreement, though there is a field work component in each of the programs, people disagree as to where that field work should take place. One type of institute is sending people out into other recognized community agencies. Others are sending people out to switchboards. Others are sending them into jails and trying to find ways to serve the unserved. There seems to be a great deal of overuse of the term "Inventory of Community Needs." This is the first thing that they have decided an urban information specialist needs to do, is inventory community needs. At one point, Binnie Tate, who many of you remember, who is now a member of the faculty at one of these institutes, threw her hands into the air and said, "There is only one problem with this; we do not agree on the definition of the terms "inventory," "community," or "needs." This seemed to be a problem.

Then as the week went on, it got more interesting, because more frustrations came to the surface, and a few more things were said. One thing that they were very concerned as faculty members was whether libraries were really ready to accept the students that were being produced in these classes. How many libraries do have a slot for someone called an urban information specialist? There was disagreement there also as to whether they were training people to serve as... They all agreed that they wanted to train change agents, and many of them were dedicated to the idea that they wanted to change the image of the library in the community; but underlying this, there was a feeling on the part of perhaps the more cynical members of the institute that what they were really trying to do was train change agents to influence library administrators, and that they really weren't doing right by their students, implying that it was going to be a rosy future for them.

One other problem: As the students went out in their field experience, and many of them worked in very exciting places--switchboards, jails--something that was very frightening and which they're beginning to experience, particularly if they do two types of field work--first work in a community agency, and then return to the library--is that the library seemed deadly dull. They have drop outs. They have another hand-holding process where they try to influence people to try to get them to continue to work within the library, and not simply drop the program altogether and decide to work for the outside agency.

Now, the other thing that came out as a frustration: Most of the people who are serving as directors within these institutes are the people who wrote the original proposal for them through their library school. It seems that they are having a lot of friction between themselves and other, more traditionally-oriented members of their own faculties, particularly if they have an institute in which some of the requirements for academic admission to the library school were dropped. There's a great deal of hostility, and some of this hostility is also generated between students if they have two types of programs--an institute program and a regular library school program. A lot of remarks go back and forth. People don't really trust each other, and they seem to feel that isn't getting any better as time goes on.

I heard a very sad story told by one of the institute directors who said that here students, amongst themselves, talk of themselves as the retarded group, and that certainly isn't what any of us have in mind.

The other thing that they're terribly concerned about is once they have graduates from these institutes, will library directors and libraries be able to appreciate the special skills that these people are bringing to them, or are they going to be judged by traditional methods? They're receiving a very short-cut approach to book selection, to cataloging, reference service; and are the libraries going to be ready for these people and their speical skills when they come to them?

Then the other thing that they're running into is a refusal of the field work unit to take them seriously. They think that it's kind of a funny thing that library schools want to put a student in a public agency, and they seem to be refusing, in many cases, to give the student any sort of responsible tasks or responsibilities. They see them more as an observer, or as someone to file some extra papers, or to do the clerical work; but this, for both students and faculty, has been very disturbing.

Now, just when I was thinking that the library schools were behind the lighthouse and that the public libraries were far, far ahead, we got to a point in the program where one of the libraries which is providing field work experience had given a problem that was to be solved by this whole group and discussed at some length. The question raised by the librarian who had been willing to take on field work students was, "What do you say to the students when the inventory of community needs turns up needs that are not covered by the library's book selection policy?" I thought this was really overwhelming, and what was even more tragic about this was that the students were blamed for discovering these needs. As long as we didn't know about them, you know, things were alright. That was the point that even I, though I had been told to be a silent observer, could no longer remain silent. I thought that was very depressing, and the librarians involved didn't seem to feel that they had any responsibility as far as this went.

Now, on Thursday afternoon some gentlemen arrived from Washington, from the Office of Education. This was the week before President Nixon announced his budget, and they came in just very hale fellow well met and invited everyone up to have a drink and talk when the afternoon meeting was over. Then they started walking around the room and talking to the institute directors and saying that they were sorry to disturb them in the course of this institute, but they would like an opportunity to talk with each one of them for 15 minutes on the following morning.

Now, on Friday morning the institute directors started going out one at a time, and zap! It was all over that quickly. Some of them came back in the room, and they had been told to just plan on discontinuing their program in June. Others were told to go back and cut their faculty in half, cut the number of students they had in half. Some were told to take their proposals back home and rewrite them at half the expense of the original cost. This was sort of ominous to us. We were still wondering what was going to happen without public library proposals at home, and it was very depressing.

What I found as a public librarian, when we all went to lunch afterwards, and they were talking about what this meant in terms of their programs, and in terms of their ongoing programs within their library schools, that it seemed to be the impression of the institute directors that no remnant of this program would remain within their library school without the federal funding, that this had a reason for being, and a reason to recognize the need. They recognized the need for urban information specialists, but without the federal funding they would go back to their traditional program, and the library school would be as I remember it in 1959. I thought that was very depressing, and I hope that's not true of many of the other library schools that have tackled some of these things without the benefit of federal programs; but I think that we should all be aware of this.

I do have a list of the library schools in which these programs were held. If people are looking for employment, many of the institute directors did suggest that their graduates in June would be real additions to any library that is ready for them.

Question

Something that Peggy said earlier, and something that you just said about the proposal writing and also working with the people directly: I had a question when Peggy said that perhaps the person working with the public might not necessarily have to be a librarian. I wonder though about whether the information specialist... Well, I guess my impression is, do you think many of these proposals were written and were accepted because it was a way to bring students into library school?

Ms. Kincaid

There is mixed feeling about that. I think that some of the proposals were written with that intent.

Question

What do you think the long-range intent would be for developing urban information specialists who are not really strong on the organizational aspects--how these programs should be developed, what their future development ought to be? I'm just wondering whether we ought to--you know, we're killing two birds with one stone here. We're trying to bring in students, and we're trying to make urban information specialists, and I'm wondering in the long range whether our objectives of library service are being affected?

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, I'm not an authority, but it doesn't seem to be that simple. It can very well work. The problem seems to be the organizing, the training, and perhaps that's why we're all here today. It can work very well, and I think you need urban information people who are from the community; but very often, if it's not handled correctly, it's like many projects. Some of you remember our Fillmore Project many years ago in BARC. It was a great idea, but it didn't work, and we learned a lot, but we never had a chance to repeat it. I think that it's not that you can't work with the backup. I think the backup librarians trained in the traditional skills are needed, but we need both.

Question

I'm not so much concerned about traditional skills, because I certainly think that we need change agents in libraries. I think half our administrators are really tired of libraries and should have been tired a long time ago. It's very unfortunate. However, I just question what the long-range objectives are and what can come about that would be most effective in the future. What are we looking for for our future leaders?

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, you may have an answer tomorrow. It's the best one I can think of, Fay Blake. She's not here today. I can just tell you what I've learned so far.

Comment

I think this is a very important area, and I think we ought to develop it. I think it should have been developed many years ago.

Question

When you were there, I wondered if you got any feeling that these information institutes were planning to cooperate or hook up information with the urban and regional planning departments of the universities. Are they doing anything like this so that their specialists have a feeling of how urban areas are changing or will change?

Ms. Kincaid

It seems to me that the program at Case Western University was the one that came closest to doing somthing like that. The students in the Atlanta University program are the ones that are going to do the inventory of community needs for the Urban Information Center in Atlanta, which is part of this consortium which Gil described previously. So they'll have a different kind of experience there.

Question

What are the schools that had these programs?

Ms. Kincaid

Let's see--Case Western; Atlanta; the University of Michigan; Wayne State had one which is no longer operating; Columbia is about to have one, a modified program; I could tell you the rest of them later in the day. I'll have to look it up. Wisconsin is the one where Binnie Tate is teaching.

Ms. O'Donnell

Thank you, Anne.

I feel like we gave you all the bad news, which is the best place to do it at the beginning, and we've heard that all these projects that have been so glorified in the literature are going to fold in about a week, or that they haven't got off the planning board. We've heard that the library schools have had great difficulty in deciding how to train and what they were training for, and it's a very real problem. However, I feel that even right here in this room, people who are not going to be speaking are working in the community and in their own library, know that things just aren't that bad; and I hope that today and tomorrow with the people that will be speaking to you on just how we can approach this problem, we will get out of the bad news and into the good news, because I do believe that this is something that is not unsolvable. It's something that we just have to do, and I feel we will do it, and I hope the rest of the program will be useful.

* * *

Our next speakers have just completed an information directory produced with special funding for a public library system. I don't know how many months they worked on it, but they're both here--Georgia Mulligan, who is the director of the project, and Karen Jemison, her assistant, who, I believe, did the index, and they'll tell you how they started the project and went about operating it, and I'm sure if you have any questions, they'll be more than glad to hear from you. Georgia.

COMPILING A COMMUNITY RESOURCE FILE

Georgia Mulligan and Karen Jemison

Ms. Mulligan

First I want to introduce John Wade and Bonnie Bowen. She's from the Health Department in San Mateo. They started an organization called the Information Consortium which was an effort on the part of interested individuals in the county who dealt with information, meaning librarians, people in health and welfare, people from the Educational Resources Center, who wanted to communicate with each other on what they were doing to get some sort of central file or cooperative referral effort started. They made a lot of progress, and I hope that you will have a chance to talk to them today, either during lunch or after the session this afternoon. I just wanted to point out that they were here.

My project was called the Inventory of Community Resources. It was a federal project and was to be done for the whole Peninsula Library System, which is the library system in San Mateo County, and it includes all the public libraries except South San Francisco and Menlo Park; but we decided to include them so that we would do really a whole county thing. It was hoped that this would act as sort of a carrot to them too, to get them to join the Peninsula Library System. I don't know if that's happened yet or not.

The idea was to compile a directory that would list sources of information only, not people or services, unless they fit in with sources of information. The idea would be that these would be places where librarians could go for information when they had exhausted their own library resources or when their library didn't have any resource; and it would also give places where librarians could tell their patrons to go for information besides the library.

Marcia Keller had just completed her card file when I started this, and she was acting as the shoulder upon which I cried many times, and she is here today, and I hope you will talk to her about hers too.

Now, Peggy has said a little bit about some of the things you should consider when you do this. We went through absolute hell for about 2 months, before we really got down to collecting information. We had to decide exactly what we were going to put into it and what we weren't. Some of the things you should consider are: What are you going to mean by community? Are you going to mean your own town, or, in our case, your own county, or what? Fortunately for me, the project proposal specifically said San Mateo County, so if somebody came to me with some fantastic resource in Los Angeles, say, I could cop out by saying, "Sorry, it's not in the county, so I don't want to hear about it." Occasionally we would hear about something that was unique, something that was not in the county in any form, but was over the border, so we would put this in. This was purely arbitrary, because even if you decide to include just those unique things outside the county, you would go on forever.

Another thing you have to consider is: Who is going to use this thing that you are going to compile? Are you trying to do a People's Yellow Pages that you're going to publish and sell? Are you going to devise an in-house file that's just going to be used by trained librarians, or what? This will definitely affect how you go about the project, and what kind of information you find, and how much detail you have about it. Karen will be talking more about indexing, and the indexing, as has already been pointed out today, is really related to who is going to use it.

Now, once you've decided what you're after, and who's going to use it, then you have to decide how you're going to go about finding this information. Since we were dealing with sources of information, we decided to start with the libraries themselves. Most libraries have what they call in San Mateo County "Idiot Files" at their reference desk. These were little card files where they had scribbled down things that kept coming up that weren't in books or that were handy to have without looking in a book every time it came up. So I went through everybody's idiot files and discovered all kinds of neat things that way, and wrote them all down. At that point I decided to make a 5x8 card file for myself to act as sort of a master file.

Then we also plowed through the different reference questions that had been recorded in different libraries, because we thought this way we would find out exactly what kinds of things that we knew librarians were going to want to know, rather than compile a lot of information that would perhaps never come up in a library. The area library, which is San Mateo Public Library, had a complete file of all the BARC questions. The trouble with going through other people's reference questions is that, even though they have written the question down, you don't really know what the question was, and they sometimes don't either. By the time it got filtered through many people and sat around for a few months, you kind of forget what the question really was. Anyway, it acted as sort of a guideline, and I would try to find out a little bit by talking to the staff about their reference questions.

Another thing that you can do, and some of these things are on the lists that Peggy put in your literature, is to go through the phone book. In the white pages you can look through things like California, San Mateo, U.S., just any number of things in the white pages. Then in the Yellow Pages you can look through things like associations, clubs, and bookstores. We decided to include bookstores, because they are sources of information. Then as you begin to get an idea of the different subjects you're interested in, you can also go through the Yellow Pages under those subjects and find the organizations that deal with those subjects.

Another source would be the organizations and people themselves. Once we started contacting these resources, it was very helpful to be able to say, "Well, do you have any resource files, and can we look at them?" Or, "Do you know anyone else?" A lot of people would try to beg off. They'd say, "Well, we don't know anything," but they would always be glad to tell you about someone who did. We found that in the libraries themselves too. We sent out questionnaires to everyone who worked in the libraries, from head administrator down to clerks, saying, "What do you know? Are you a resource?" We found very often that they didn't think they were good for anything but maybe pushing a book truck around, but they would love to tell about their friends and the other people they worked with. So I would get 2 questionnaires back, and one person would tell me about the other person and all his traits; and the other person who had just been told about, who said he didn't have any talents at all, would be telling me about the other person. So I had sort of like a spy system set up, and eventally I found out all these people's deep, dark secrets.

The newspapers are a great resource. Usually there is a society page that talks about clubs and different things going on. In San Mateo County 2 newspapers have columns that deal with problems. The San Mateo Times had a help column where people would write in that their lamp post had been knocked down, or their cat's tail had been cut off, or something, and they didn't know who to report it to. One of the newspaper reporters would go out and dig up the answer and write it in the newspaper. The Redwood City Tribune did the same thing called "Action Line," and that was very helpful. We contacted the people who did those to see what kind of files they had, and sometimes we found out that their files were all in their head, but that was another really good resource.

One of the things librarians said they wanted in this directory was a list of people who could translate and interpret other languages. They didn't necessarily want people who were experts. They just wanted someone who could read a passage; or if some patron came into the library with a letter from Germany, from their aunt or something, they just wanted someone who could give them an idea of what the letter said. I found translators in places like banks; and we tried to explore all the restaurants in San Mateo when we were doing this project, and they have quite a variety of restaurants down there. When we would go into a Greek restaurant or something like that, I would try to find out if the people who were working in these restaurants were actually from the countries that the food represented, and then flip them a questionnaire. That worked very well. In clothing stores too, if they're importing clothes from other countries, they often go to the other countries to buy; and I found one store owner who knew several languages. So it's endless. You have to keep your mind open. You have to retrain your brain to keep it open to ideas.

Another thing you have to think about is not only who collects what kind of information, but how you can use their information. For example, the county clerk and recorder collects information on births and deaths, and anyone who starts a business has to file with the county the name of the business. They may be collecting it for a reason that doesn't interest you, but you may be able to use their file for something totally different. For example, the Elections Office: Anyone who registers to vote gives out his name and address, and if you have an unlisted phone number, you can't call up the phone company, if you're trying to find a friend of yours, and get the address of that person, because the phone number is unlisted. Therefore, the address is unlisted too; but what you could do is call up the Elections Office, and if that person registered to vote, the Elections Office will look up the name for you and give you the address. I know this works, because I had a lost friend who lived in Hillsborough. I hadn't seen her in 8 years, and she had an unlisted phone number, and I found her by calling up the Elections Office, and she took me out to lunch. Of course, you can turn this around the other way. If you actually have a reference question that you are working on, you think, "Who collects this type of information?" Then you can contact them and find out if they will give that information out.

Those are some of the ways we try to find sources of information. Once you start figuring out how to find it, you have to start figuring out what you're going to do with it. This was really the essence of our project. I think we spent more time dealing with it than finding it. It really isn't that hard to find. You get to the point where you don't want to find it any more.

I might also add at this point that if you are going to get involved in this kind of thing, there are, of course, many different ways. We chose the phone, because we felt by calling people up, there would be a personal touch, and it would be good PR for the library. We devised the questionnaire for people who didn't have phones, or when we could never get through; and we did some actual visiting at the beginning of the project to get some feel for what we were going to be having to ask over the phone; but the visiting, which I think is ideal, just takes entirely too much time. You can spend all day just visiting one or two places, and you'll never get done.

Now, dealing with the information gathered: There are different ways, and Peggy has pointed out to you the different formats. We chose this format, which is a looseleaf binder that you can buy in any store. For the most part, we tried to list one resource per page, because we felt that we were going to have enough to say about most resources so that it would fill a page of about this size. This is half the size of a normal sheet of paper. It's 5 1/2 x 8 1/2. We left room on the page for notes, in most cases, too, because we knew, no matter how hard we tried, once people started using this directory, they were going to be discovering things, good or bad, that we hadn't in the process of collecting information; and we wanted to make it as easy as possible for them to improve on what we had said about it.

The card file idea is great. Librarians tend to have 3x5 minds anyway, and most of us would have empty drawers and places at our reference desks for card files. We, again, chose the directory format, because a lot of librarians in San Mateo County were very crowded for space. Also, since we were publishing out about 45 copies of these for all the libraries and branches, it was just too expensive to put this out on cards. The whole idea behind the project was to get it started in a way that it could be kept going once the federal funding ran out. Federal funding is running out now, and what I'm trying to do is orient the librarians in keeping this up, and we felt that it would be easier to keep up in this format than in a card format. We have all the advantages of cards. With the looseleaf you can insert and pull out easily, and it's easy to update the index.

We also have the master file that I told you about. We have a card index file, and then we have the 5x8 file. So there is a card file. It's just not a card file for everyone. It's just one that will be kept in a central place.

As I said before, this is arranged so there is one resource per page, and then, so you can get at the information in the directory, we devised an index. Karen Jemison helped me with this project, and she volunteered to do the index for it. We were both doing it for awhile, and one day she came to me and said, "You know, both of us shouldn't be doing this." We were beginning to hate each other. We were always arguing, so I said, "That's a fantastic idea, Karen; why don't you do it?" So she still hates me, but we got the index done with less arguing. Karen, do you want to talk a little bit about the indexing, and how we decided to go about indexing all these things?

Ms. Jemison

Well, first off, as Georgia said, the directory was initially designed to be arranged by each individual agency, organization, person, etc. So you needed a subject index. We figured you needed a subject index even if you arranged things by subject; but, of course, this fell down immediately. We got things that couldn't fill up a page, and we didn't want to put them just in the index; so we arranged groups of people. For instance, translators ended up all in the same area under "Translators."

Well, in order to index, we decided that we would use Reader's Guide, because librarians were familiar with it; patrons were familiar with it, and we thought--and this turned out to be falacious--that librarians would go to Reader's Guide, and then when they didn't find anything, they might resort to the directory, and therefore, they'd have the subject headings right there in their head all set up.

Originally this directory was designed to be restricted to librarians, but it didn't always work out that way. We found sometimes they were cataloged and put on the shelves, so we wanted to get terms that were equitable to both parties. Well, I suppose what I'm really here to do is to show that you can do this and survive. It takes a lot of stamina, and I'm now on fruit juice and coke.

OK, we decided on Reader's Guide, and because there is a possibility--there is one way you can arrange this so people can use it--I think Reader's Guide was an excellent choice, because you can use it even if you don't accept their terms, and we didn't always. We used popular terms. For instance, we called them "Switchboards" instead of--what was it--"Telephone nooks, centers, etc." But you can use Reader's Guide even if you don't use the headings. You can use them as cross-references, so that if you're using popular terms you can stick in the terms for the librarian who is going to look under "Automobiles, Maintenance and Repair" instead of "Cars--Fix It."

Once we decided on using Reader's Guide, then we were faced with the problem that we were really indexing both information and services. We aimed for information, but when an agency or a person could give services also--for instance, conducted hiking tours, or was interested in back packing--we included it on the sheet, and therefore, felt we had to index it. Well, that presents its own difficulties, and as Georgia said, we were including bookstores, but you really don't know how to index things like adult novelties, which we got into when we covered adult bookstores. So we decided that we were not going to design any master sheet of terms that could be used. There's at least one agency in San Mateo which is interested in compiling such a list, but I'm afraid that libraries aren't going to be able to use it, because the combination of information and services is usually unique to your community, and therefore, your index shows the same convoluted mind that the people in your community do. So you can't do that, so we gave up on that. Instead we decided to make the index useful in other ways.

First of all, I got stuck with doing it. That helps. You have to have one person doing it so that you maintain a continuity, both in terms and in the thought that goes behind it, so that once your quirky little mind is displayed in the index, and the user masters that, he doesn't have to master anybody else's quirky little mind.

Secondly, we put the index in front on different colored paper, which was very revolutionary; and rather than use subheadings, which are familiar to librarians more perhaps than anybody else, we used descriptors, much as a biographical novel would use descriptors, so that we cut down on the number of headings that we used.

We also showed in the index the restricted sources. Now, in the main body of the directory we have little black dots which appear prominently with the title of each person, agency, organization, etc. Well, we put those in the index, so you could tell immediately which sources were restricted. This is also useful, because if you want to put the directory out where the public can use it, there are always going to be some sources where the person has requested that this information not be available immediately to the public, that you screen it, or only the librarian can call, and there are always people who are eager to call and say they are a librarian, and "Please give me the information." So if you have the black dot in the index, you can still use the complete index for the book, but you can pull out the sheets and put them somewhere else. Then you have a public and a private directory, and this often suits librarians more than any other feature. We didn't suggest it, but it can be used that way, and you don't have to rip up your index. With these restricted sources there's often a problem in that you cannot diplomatically write down on a page information which the user really should have about the source, because sources occasionally look at the page. We once in awhile sent pages for them to correct, or to take a look at to see if they were appreciative of the service. We found, for instance, one Czech translator, and we were very pleased, because he was willing and able to translate Czech. He was the only person we found. Unfortunately, he was in his 90's, but you can't say, "He's pretty feeble." So instead, you have to say somewhere, "Please call your library and ask if he's dead yet."

Well, anyway, that kind of added information we put in the index in most cases. For instance, we did put a lot of information about the *Yellow Pages*, where to look under the *Yellow Pages* that people didn't seem to find, librarians didn't seem to find. So we said, "Look in the *Yellow Pages* under such and such," or we'd give phone numbers. For instance, we had a film school where you could go and learn how to shoot your own movies on the weekends. We didn't have enough information really to justify a whole page, and this was getting very bulky. So we put information like that--smog phones, snow phones, anything else--in the index, with a telephone number, with an address if we had it, and other useful hints as to where to go generally to find information. "For credit ratings, go see the president of your bank"--things like that.

Finally, we decided to use extensive cross-referencing, because unless you do, you're going to over-use a few sources, and they will hate you forever; and you are not ever going to use a few sources, and they'll feel they're lost. Maybe they'll be happy that they will never hear from you, but on the other hand, several people are quite eager to be included in the directory. So you want to make sure that you cover as many bases as possible. So that's what we did in this index; we tried to make it as absolutely useful as we could.

I have only one suggestion for anyone who wants to try this kind of project, and that is to be sure and tape your phone conversations, because they will offer you hours of listening pleasure. After you're all finished with them, maybe you can sell them to Bob Newhart for his monologues. That I really miss. That's what I really wish we had done. It certainly would have saved everyone's sanity if we could have recalled some of those.

The directory is now called *Inforama*, and we are debating about a cover ever still. If you have any questions for Georgia or me, please ask.

Question

How long did it take you to compile that, and how many entries do you have?

Ms. Mulligan

We started in May, and people always like to think of things as being complete. I keep trying to tell people that this is still going on, and it never ends, because it's sort of an organic thing. Things die out, and you add new things.

Question

Just for what you have there, how many entries do you have, and how much time did it take? Also, how many people worked on it?

Ms. Mulligan

There are about 400 specific items, and it took 2 people, part time, 8 months.

Question

You said one of the reasons that you decided to use that format rather than cards was because it was more expensive to reproduce cards. I don't understand why.

Ms. Mulligan

Well, we were only going to be publishing around 40 copies of this, and we talked to different people who do cards. There are some companies that will do cards, and will microfilm your catalog cards, and will produce 5 or 6 cards, or whatever. Then some libraries do their own cards. We found that we just couldn't do a card for less than 2¢ or 3¢ per card. If you were going to do a lot more copies, then the price per card goes down. The same thing is true for paper. This directory was reproduced in the San Mateo County Library, which has an offset press, and it was less than 1/2¢ per page. This volume is probably no more than $8. We haven't gotten the final figures on that, unfortunately. I thought I would have that for today, but I don't.

Question

When you talk about descriptors, do you mean direct entry versus inverted entry, or are you talking about single-word descriptors?

Ms. Jemison

No, what I'm talking about--for instance, for swimming you would have several entries, but preceding each entry we would have "Classes--American Red Cross," for instance; or, "If your kid is drowning in the bathtub, please help him by calling...", or whatever else. Anything that cuts a tie in going to entries that aren't going to help you.

Question

I think I got lost somewhere. Am I wrong? You've got your Inforama notebook; you've got a master file; and then you've got a card file?

Ms. Mulligan

For every resource we have a 5x8 card, and then what we would do is sit down by the phone with that card, and we would have name, address, and all the standard things that you would want to know on the card to remind us while we were on the phone. We would fill that out, and it's a mess. No one could read it but us.

Ms. Jemison

It's awfully useful, because there are resources that we rejected for one reason or another.

Ms. Mulligan

Right. Then as a companion to that, we put our subject index on cards per word so that you could add to each card. Then when we update this--like when we publish this, we put it out in stages. I did a few of them way back at the beginning of the project to see if the whole thing was going to work, because we didn't want to spend 8 months doing this and then find out that it wasn't what anyone wanted. So we put a piece of it out with a small index and sent it out to all the libraries to see how they would react before we continued. Of course, each time you add a resource, you've got to index it, so we would add to our index. Then each time we sent out a new piece we'd sit down and retype the index completely, but we didn't have to retype the whole directory, because they would just insert the new pieces.

Ms. Jemison

One thing we did also was, at the end of each source we included a little thing called "Subjects," and we showed what the subjects were indexed under.

Ms. Mulligan

So if you're a human resource you can see not only what we said about you, but how we indexed you. So if you don't like it, you can add to it or tell us what to cut out. We can redo that page.

Ms. Jemison

It's really a cataloging project; that's really what it boils down to.

Question

Did I understand you correctly, that each time you bring out a new page, say a new agency, you bring out a whole new index?

Ms. Jemison

Well, presumably you're doing this thing in parts, and you wait until you've got a huge chunk until you re-index. That way you're not indexing once a week.

Ms. Mulligan

The first piece we put out came out in September, and we've put out 2 since then. It was my idea that this would be kept up maybe twice a year. You get a certain bulk, and then it starts going down. The project isn't officially over until June, and we're really still working on it, but what we're trying to do now is to get a system going where all owners of the directory, i.e., all the libraries and their branches, can feed in maybe to a central point with new information. They may use a source and find out the phone number's been changed, or they may discover a new agency; and we're trying to set it up so they can easily send in new information, maybe even in the format that's on this page. It's not that difficult to figure out. Then, when a significant number piles up, and update the index, and have it published and sent out.

Gil McNamee

Georgia, how will you update those things that have changed addresses or phone numbers that people haven't found? Will you do it by postcards, like once a year?

Ms. Mulligan

Right, and I mentioned earlier that we used a questionnaire somewhat, because you do run into places that just have a P.O. box. As Karen pointed out, we have a date on each page too, so you'll know how old the information is, and someone could go through their directory, and if a page wasn't automatically updated through use, you could get all the ones older than a certain date and send out a new questionnaire, or send out a copy of the page and say, "Is this still true? Was it ever true?"

Question

What kind of use have the agencies... Have you recorded any usage factor at all?

Ms. Mulligan

Well, we don't have any statistics. I got a lot of feedback, because I kept begging for a response from the library. We did include a sheet called "Suggestions for Resources" as sort of a hint that they should be filling this out, and they started coming in more and more, so I know from that that the libraries are using them.

Question

Who are you funded through? Also, how can this type of information be disseminated to traditionally non-library users?

Ms. Mulligan

This was from an LSCA grant that we got through the State Library, a federal grant. Secondly, what we're working on right now is publicity for this project. We want to run some newspaper articles and perhaps do up some brochures that would have specific examples of kinds of information one could get from their libraries, because the library has this directory, and leave them just anywhere that we could think of--laundromats, gas stations, recreation centers.

Ms. Jemison

What we had really hoped to do was bring out something that didn't have restricted sources in it that could be disseminated, left on tables in health agencies, bars, etc.

Ms. Mulligan

This is a beginning. We're hoping that librarians will take it and do things with it. You could take the directory and pull out things on a certain subject. One idea I had was to do up little cards on sources of information, maybe on food, and maybe hang them in the stacks by the cookbooks, or maybe get the grocery stores to hang them up.

Question [Cannot be heard.]

Ms. Mulligan

OK, she asked me to tell you exactly what kinds of information we do say about these different agencies. Of course, it varies from agency to agency, but we did design some categories. We had the name, the address, the phone number, the hours; and if there was a specific person that should be asked for, we put that person's name down. Normally we did not do this, because we felt if there was turnover in the agency, then the page would be out of date. Then below that we had a category called Information Available, and we would just write down everything we learned about what kind of information they had, and what they didn't have. Then we had categories like Speakers, Tours, Services. When we did Special Libraries, we would talk about strengths of the collection, what kind of equipment they had. A lot of public libraries had typewriters for rent, or some of them even for free. We put that in there. We found out that was very useful. Also, photocopy machines, whether they would loan things on interlibrary loan.

Question

I wanted to ask if you had any form of relationship with community originated or generated types of switchboards in existence in the county, and did you ever consider giving them the directory?

Ms. Jemison

We did talk to people on the switchboards--for instance, the San Mateo County Department of Social Services Resource Staff, which does this kind of information. Unfortunately, we were budgeted only for, and the project was written only to include, these directories in the libraries in the Peninsula Library System. So we didn't make any extra copies, but we're hoping that will be done so that other agencies can participate. We did get a large response from people asking for copies, and we had to say no.

Ms. Mulligan

We have received written requests for this, and I'm going to ask the board to decide whether they want to arrange to provide a lot of people who have requested copies. Fortunately, it isn't my decision to make. I would love to give it out to everyone.

Question

Do you do any subjective evaluations like you can find in the People's Yellow Pages?

Ms. Mulligan

No; we would have liked to have said, "When you call up a place, they're mean," or something like that; but we didn't feel that we could do that. Even though there is some control over it, we didn't want to over-control.

Ms. Jemison

If you're dealing with a business, you can be pretty sure that at least the owner is stable. He's going to be there, but the turnover is so great. We may talk to somebody who is absolutely fantastic, so we put that down; and when they call, they get somebody who has just had a divorce, and the directory does not seem to be very truthful.

Ms. Mulligan

As Karen has pointed out though, when there was something about an agency--like if there was a restriction on it, we used the black dot to act as a warning sign to librarians. What we hope also will happen is that there will be a lot of verbal exchange. The reference librarians meet monthly, and they are planning to exchange information. There's nothing to prevent an individual, of course, from writing in his own copy that So and So is nice, or don't talk to this one, and so on. That's why we left room so they could do this kind of thing on their own copies.

Question

You said that you sent a copy of the directory to each one of your libraries. Where is the library is it kept?

Ms. Jemison

That really varies. It was designed to be kept right behind the reference desk so that it would be ever-handy, but it depends. Sometimes it's still stuck up in cataloging.

Ms. Mulligan
One place we couldn't find it at all. Sometimes it has been misunderstanding too, like as the project moved along a lot of decisions were made, and some fields were narrowed to keep the project under control, and sometimes these decisions didn't filter down all the way. So the way the directory is being used varies from place to place, but now we're having conferences with each library to sort of clear up these misunderstandings. So much PR is necessary.

Question
Did you ever consider listing the libraries with a subjective evaluation of their resources?

Ms. Mulligan
Yes, I did. I thought of that, and what I finally did was send them an order to write out a page describing their own library to see what they would say about what they had to offer. I've only gotten one back, but it was interesting.

Ms. O'Donnell
I think you may have covered this, but I think that must be a problem when you make the resource directory from the outside, a certain resentment, and a feeling--"Well, I know my own community better than someone from the outside." I think if people are going to have to use this kind of way to get the directory, I think there should be some tips on how you can make it acceptable to the library and make it work.

Ms. Mulligan
Having done this, I don't think that I would necessarily recommend this as the way of doing it. We were doing it for a whole system, so no matter who did it, there would always be some foreign character. I doubt if you could find one person who would be intimately familiar with all the communities he dealt with. What I tried to do in the beginning was, I went around to all the libraries and looked at their idiot files and asked them what they thought I should be doing. Of course, I came out with many different ideas of what I was supposed to be doing, and then I tried to blend them altogether and make everyone maybe a little bit happy. It was difficult doing it for a library system. I think it would be easier to do it for just one library at a time.

I would say that if you're going to try to do this yourself, I think it could be a part maybe of one person's job, or at least one person on your staff could act as coordinator, and all the other people on the staff could feed into it. I think it should be organic. Rather than sit down and try to do it in one hunk of time, decide how you're going to do it, and then just do it continuously from one day on forever. Build it into the system.

Comment [Cannot be heard.]

Ms. Mulligan
One thing I did want to say that happened: Some people did think that I was trying to suggest that now that we know other places you can go for information and other people you can contact, maybe we don't need libraries any more. That was not the idea at all. We were just trying to help ourselves and our patrons by giving them more places to go for help.

Ms. O'Donnell
Are there any other questions? Well, thank you very much.

TELL ME WHO CAN HELP--

Role Playing with the BARC Staff

Peggy O'Donnell

The next portion of our program grew out of a plan that I had originally hoped to do for this workshop. Those of you who have been with us for five long years know that when BARC started to give workshops, we didn't get big crowds. In fact, fifty people was a big crowd. That had a good side too, because we were able to do buzz sessions, discussions, and role playing, and really involve the audience. I find that now you're pretty much sitting out there and being lectured at, and I'm sorry about that. I wish there was some way to work that out.

When I began to plan for this, as always, I said, "We probably won't get too many people, and so I thought we would try a little role playing. I had a suggestion of Georgia's who tells me it was originally Stefan Moses'. I went through the New York Times' "100 Neediest Cases"--you know, that Christmas issue. For those of you who know the New York Times, this section is a fund raiser for charity. What I did, I went through and I picked out six needy cases, and I thought, "Now, if those cases came in, or friends of those cases if those cases couldn't come in, would the library have the information and resources to direct them to helpful agencies?" I planned to have you all in groups, and pass this around, and ask you to think if you should handle this kind of thing, what kinds of questions would you have to ask to get the right information to the patrons or their friends? What agencies do you know of in your community that you could think of off-hand? What resources could you think of in your community to look in? I really thought it was a good idea, but obviously, this just wouldn't work in a room this size with this many people.

So, the next thing I planned to do was with the BARC staff. This is not a BARC skit. We really did role-play this the first time. Of course, we have now played it twice, so it will not exactly seem spontaneous. The first time we did it we simply took roles, and reacted, and found some things coming out about our own views (about our role views) about whether librarians should indeed get into this kind of thing, because in order to help people, sometimes you have to ask a lot of questions and get a lot of information. We found several things happened when we got into that kind of situation, and we revealed things about our own attitudes toward librarianship.

So what we did to kind of organize things--I would like to ask everybody--you know, also remember those questions I gave you this morning--as we go along, if you have any comments, or agree or disagree with this person, or if you feel there's something you would have input in the situation, please share them with us.

Basically, what we're going to do, the people who will be role playing with me--and we'll have to just stand in front of you, because you couldn't see us if we sat down in a normal situation--Bonnie Thoreen and Sonia Cole, and they'll start off by being a patron and a librarian. Then, Bonnie Thoreen and Sonia, Roberto Esteves and myself will be librarians in a staff meeting. So we'll start with Bonnie and Sonia.

* * *

Ms. Cole - Can you help me please?

Ms. Thoreen - Perhaps, perhaps.

Ms. Cole - Well, my sister... Well, it's very difficult to explain. She's bedridden at this point. She's got an incurable disease, and she has three small children. Her husband is now working two jobs to pay for their medical bills and everything. Well, the reason I came to the library was I thought maybe that there might be something here that would help me help her, because with these three little children, and she can't get out of bed any more, and her husband is so overworked. Is there anything that you can suggest for me to do?

Ms. Thoreen - Well, I... I mean, I don't know what to suggest. That kind of stuff doesn't come in books exactly. Well, does she belong to a church? Maybe her church could do something.

Ms. Cole - Well, not really. I tried to go to the Welfare Department, but they don't qualify.

Ms. Thoreen - Yes, I was thinking about welfare, too.

Ms. Cole - Well, see, I just couldn't get any results when I went over there. They tried to suggest some different agencies, but I didn't understand where the agencies were. They sounded like they were all over town and, well, I just didn't know where to go. So, I thought if I came to the library, maybe I could find some way to get at these. I just really don't know.

Ms. Thoreen - I just really don't know either. I mean, I'd like to do something for you, but, well, I really don't know what to suggest. The only thing I could say is maybe you could send her to the Public Health Department or something like that.

Ms. Cole - OK, well, I could try that.

Ms. Thoreen - I mean, I'm really sorry, but I just don't know what to do.

Ms. Cole - I know. I know, it's a difficult problem. I guess I shouldn't have come to the library. Thank you.

* * *

AT THE STAFF MEETING

Ms. O'Donnell -Well, I guess we've taken care of the problem of library security. Does anybody have anything else they want to bring up before we leave this meeting?

Ms. Thoreen - Well, I feel really bad. This lady came into the library, and she was obviously disturbed. Her sister was sick, and she had three kids, and I don't know; I guess her husband was working two jobs, and she wanted to know if we could give her some help, and I didn't know what to do. So I sent her to Public Health. I mean, I suggested a church group and...

Mr. Esteves - I think you did the best thing possible.

Ms. Thoreen - I mean, here she went out the door, and I don't know if she got any help or not.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, Bonnie, what was her need? I see the problem you've told me, but what was the woman looking for? Was she looking for medical help, or child care, or employment possibilities, or what did she need?

Ms. Thoreen - I guess she needed all those things. I didn't really ask her. It wasn't really my business.

Ms. Cole - I think that's sort of true. I remember that day, and Bonnie was so busy at the desk. All the phones were ringing, and she didn't have a chance to really ask the lady. Besides, we're not trained to be social workers. You know, we need some training if we're going to help these people.

Ms O'Donnell - Well, don't you feel, Bonnie, that if you had asked her a few more questions, without getting too personal, or--you know, not necessarily being a social worker, but at least help the woman to identify the need. We do have a community resource list, and if it was day care that she needed, or Meals on Wheels...

Mr. Esteves - You mean the idiot file? I think it would be very wrong to refer people using that thing. We never work on it. It's just sitting there.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, it seems that we'll never work on it if we don't use it.

Ms. Thoreen - Well, I didn't really think of that. I somehow felt like it wasn't really up to me to do it. You know, like I was in the other department the other day, and I heard somebody answer the phone; and I guess somebody on the other end of the line wanted to know where they could get a vasectomy, and the librarian said, "Well, you don't call the library for that kind of thing."

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, then you feel that you don't call the library for information on vasectomies.

Ms. Thoreen - Well, I would have liked to help, but...

Mr. Esteves - I feel that we should really try and build up our pamphlet collection.

Ms. O'Donnell - Meanwhile, everybody in the family has died while you're building up your pamphlet collection.

Ms. Cole - I really think it is our job to give out information, but maybe we need to work harder on learning how to find this other form of information. I think we need some sort of in-service training, because I, myself, don't know where to begin.

Mr. Esteves - We need so much in-service training for just what we're doing now. If we're going to start becoming lawyers, and medical specialists and social workers, we're really just trying to do too much.

Ms. Thoreen - Well, the other thing is, if we start something like this, then we'll have to go through the thing with subject headings, and we won't be able to decide...

Mr. Esteves - Well, that I can do.

Ms. Thoreen - What I'm saying is, if we do a file, it has to be useful.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, isn't it a question of priorities? You seem to think it's not important enough to put the time in, unless, you know...

Ms. Cole - Well, I think we have to decide and make a commitment. If we are going to do this, I think we have to do it very well so that we don't give people wrong information, or out-of-date information. I'd be willing to help set something up. Maybe we could divide the old information file up and see what areas ought to be worked on.

Mr. Esteves - I think we'd be wasting an awful lot of time though, because those A-Z's change, and you get people moving, and--you know, you're never going to get the same type of help from the same people twice.

Ms. O'Donnell - And therefore, because it's difficult, we shouldn't do it.

Mr. Esteves - Right, I think we can do other things with our time.

Ms. Thoreen - Well, it would take a lot of time.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, if we don't do it, who's going to do it?

Mr. Esteves - Well, you didn't have time with people calling and so on--right? So how can you treat these people and handle them and give them all the services they need? It's a dangerous thing and, you know, I don't mind being relevant; just as long as it isn't dangerous.

Ms. Cole - I think, Roberto, when you said relevant--I mean, I don't want to put you down, Roberto, but relevant is a word that gets used a lot. It's sort of true in a way, though, because if we are going to respond to the community, maybe we've got to do more along this line. I think it's really important to work on it, but I don't know where to start myself.

Mr. Esteves - Well, I think if you're going to make it a priority, you've got to work on it, and not just have a sloppy file lying around; but I don't really think that that's what we should be doing.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, back to Bonnie's problem. What do you feel? Do you feel that not only was that woman not helped, but it's unlikely that she'll darken our doors again?

Ms. Thoreen - Yeah, I'm sure. I wish she hadn't come in in the first place. You know, when she was there I hated to get involved with her problem, and yet, I hated to send her away without giving her any help. It was really hard, and I feel real bad about it.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, I think maybe it's not so much the work of compiling a resource file, because I know that Roberto is very good at compiling files. I think it's more what you're talking about, that we don't want to get involved. It's alright to tell them where the cooking schools are, but not where these social organizations are. Well, how do the rest of you feel? What should we do about this problem?

Mr. Esteves - I think we should really check out the alternative methods of directing these people--building up our pamphlet file, and really doing some striking collections as far as ephemeral materal. I think that's probably the best way we can do this.

Ms. Cole - I don't agree. I think we should try to find maybe a prototype of a file to set up ours better, or do some kind of research into this matter. I think it's going to come up again.

Ms. Thoreen - Yeah, we might be able to work with some of the swithcboards. I would hate to start from scratch.

Ms. O'Donnell - Well, do we generally feel though, that we have the time to do this?

Mr. Esteves - I don't think we're going to have time to do what you're really planning.

Ms. Thoreen - Maybe we could drop some of the other things that we do.

* * * * * *

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, the staff meeting ends 2 to 2, whatever it was. The sad point is, you know, we see this happen over and over, I'm sure, and you have too, that there are people on both sides of the issue making a decision in this service. Some people feel that we should actively involve ourselves, and others--you know, why? You know, just as Roberto said, build up a pamphlet file--you know, strengthen your collection. We really only did this because we sort of found that we had different views ourselves on what the library should be doing and what our roles are. But I'd like to hear from some of you. Did you all agree with Roberto? Did some of you agree with Sonia? I'd like to hear your comments, and also, are you doing anything? I mean, if any library has a file, except for Gordon, who will talk to us later, does anybody have anything to say?

Gordon McShean

Can I say something now? One of the comments just at the end there about contacting the switchboards: I have very little hope for public libraries. I really think you're not going to do very much in a big hurry. If you're stuck with a question like that, and you know your library is not going to be able to help somebody, for God's sake, refer somebody to your local switchboard. I've worked with switchboards. Some of our best referrals were from agencies that people thought should help them but didn't. For instance, a lot of our referrals were from the Telephone Company. We had notices up on the telephone operators' boards saying, "Look, if somebody calls, and they're heartbroken about something, give them our number, and we'll help them. So, remember your local switchboard if you can't help them.

Comment

I don't know what your final decision would have been, but in one instance, your decision was to go out and establish a file, and I would question the decision. How do you get enough information to know that this is something that you really should change your priorities to do?

Ms. O'Donnell

I think maybe we didn't do that well enough. The point was that we all go through situations like that. It's just that she decided to share her experience, because she felt badly. I mean, she didn't really... I mean, Public Health might have been where the woman could have gotten some help. She didn't know that it wasn't the answer. She just didn't know it was the answer.

Question

Has anyone encountered any difficulty--for instance, if you didn't want to start from scratch, and you probably would call your local community switchboard and say, "Could we start out by Xeroxing your file?" Has any resistance been encountered?

Ms. O'Donnell

I don't know. Does anyone here from a switchboard want to take that on?

Comment

I'm not from a switchboard, but one thing is that every county and state health and welfare department is required to have directory and resource file service. The quality of that varies a lot. Usually, something is done once a year. By the end of the year half of it is out of date, but, at least for San Mateo County, it's our best bet. Also, the switchboards do have files. As far as getting the files out of them, it varies a lot. Some are really friendly. They're just glad to share information. Others are really uptight about it. They don't want to share their information with anybody.

Comment

The San Jose Public Library has an information desk, and we do have a general information file, and we can refer people to all kinds of social and service agencies. We also work closely with the Information and Referral Center in San Jose. If I don't have the answer, I start calling until I find out.

Ms. O'Donnell

Yes, you do call out. That was something that we meant to bring out a lot more strongly, and I forgot it this time in our role playing; but we felt that if you didn't know the answer, at least--you know, in this case, if Bonnie had called Public Health and said, "Well, is this the place I should send this woman?"--you know, some of us felt that was an important thing for librarians to do; and your library does do that.

Question

Once you do have a resource file, how do you get the librarians to use it?

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, my comment, when I was making an outline for this, the last sentence was, "With a good back-up file, each librarian will decide for herself how much help she will give." I find that a cynical answer, but I'm afraid that part of the problem with our situation was that it would have involved a little more in-depth interviewing than Bonnie was willing to do, because she would have asked the woman--"What are your major needs? Do you have any money? Who's taking care of the kids now?"--and a lot of personal questions; and I feel that that's another problem. Even if you're willing to give the service and look at the file and check out several agencies, I think a lot of us don't want to ask these kinds of questions. They're too personal.

Question

One of the things in the book by Lipscomb that you mentioned earlier, which she brings out, is that there is a rivalry, or perhaps even a jealousy, and the fact that many of these agencies don't want to work with the library. They feel that the library is usurping their responsibilities. I think this is something we should be aware of if we move in this direction.

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, of course, if we got out into the community and talked with some of these agencies, we would recognize these attitudes and be able to deal with them. It's very difficult if you're not ever talking to them to know whether they welcome you or want to fight with you. I'm a little concerned that we don't get out and talk to them.

Comment

We've started this. We just developed a directory in the Pasadena area, and we did a lot of contact with local agencies. We found that there was a lot of willingness to give us information that we could put into the directory, because the directory was a very limited kind of tool; but I just wonder what kind of cooperation we will get when we want to move into more expanded areas. I sense that we won't be quite as welcome.

Gil McNamee

Enoch Pratt had that trouble. They said, "Those people aren't social workers; they're librarians; keep the hell out!"

Sue Critchfield

Just one interesting thing that came out of that role playing thing is that obviously one of the main things that is needed for your staff is that the patron never really asked the question, you see; and so you're sort of putting the cart before the horse. Really, what the bedridden patron needed was some recreation reading material that you have, maybe. I mean, this question never came out, and so obviously, if you don't have any basic in-service training in your library--I mean, you may have everything right there and not even know it, if you don't even bother to find out what the patron needs.

Ms. O'Donnell

Yeah, I thought that was one thing that we really wanted to stress, that too often, especially if it's sort of an embarrassing situation, we will be glad to dismiss them with quick answers, and we don't have to talk to them.

Comment

I'd like to get away from stressing this other agencies' jealousies, because I think, like you said, if you get out and really talk to people who are working in these areas enough that they get to know you, then you can work with them. I had this experience in Vallejo where I thought there was really nothing left, but when I got out and started talking to some of these people, and I started getting their cooperation, you'd be surprised how much added information you can gather once you've started working with some of these people.

Comment

The inter-agency stuff can be dealt with. You can go out and make friends with a lot of different people, but it takes a lot of getting out of the library.

Georgia Mulligan

I wanted to point out earlier that it's really helpful to have examples, too. If you call up somebody and say you want to list them, if you can describe to them a typical situation, then they can even help you in telling how to say what their service is, and you're giving good reference.

Ms. O'Donnell

Obviously, again, you must talk to them so that you can get the information.

Mr. McShean

On the inter-agency jealousies, I found that since we changed our emphasis from being librarian to other agencies, to the original switchboard concept of a volunteer, a person who is not a professional threatening the professional agency, we're getting a lot more cooperation; and it's a lot easier to talk to them and say, "The workers will be referring people to you, because they're only volunteers."

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, of course, that works in your project, but in most of these cases it's not volunteers; it's librarians.

Comment

Also, it seemed to me in the role playing that the librarian didn't listen very carefully, because the patron did mention that some agencies had been suggested to her, but she didn't know where they were. Now, here was one area in which the librarian could have immediately picked up, asked for the name of the agencies, and provided that.

Ms. O'Donnell

Yes. Bonnie's role was to be embarrassed and uninvolved. She's really a very good librarian.

I have one question before we get onto our next speaker. Did any of you look at your questions? Anyone who happened to look at those questions, was the general feeling that back home you could have answered them all--with the help of reference books, of course?

Comment

Peggy, you might want to hear about one question we had at my library. Someone needed some help on child custody, and I immediately referred them to CRLA, and I found out later that CRLA would not touch child custody cases with a ten-foot pole, and there is no other resource to go to.

Ms. O'Donnell

That's interesting. In some communities there would be some kinds of alternatives available to you, like people who are working in a street lawyer type of situation who would help you out. All you can say is that in your community this might happen. So some of these questions I gave you, you may not have any answers for them in your community. My feeling, when I read through that, and I read through it very quickly, was that there should be some kind of source in most libraries--you know, a directory, or an agency, or some place you could call, some feeling that you could get answers. Those are quite legitimate questions, and they're certainly very realistic questions. I don't know how you felt generally, those of you who had time to read it. I feel those are the kinds of things we should be able to answer, just as much as we should be able to help on a research or bibliographic search. Any comments?

Question [Cannot be heard]

Ms O'Donnell

Well, this is Georgia's file. I don't know whether they can all be answered with

Georgia's file, but like a combination of the Social Directory, People's Yellow Pages, and some of the other things that are on your list, you could probably find them all--and the Telephone Book, and a knowledge about your community, reading your newspapers.

I had a very interesting experience when I was getting ready for this workshop, and I may just be a failure as a reference librarian. I had someone else help me, though. Just looking in the phone book, I tried to get the emergency poison number. I know there's an emergency poison number, but I never found it. I mean, I could have been dead. I could have called the operator, of course, but I just wanted to see if I could run to the phone book and find the emergency poison number, and I couldn't.

Comment

Just out of the first six here, I think we could answer at least adequately from your point of view at least four of those first six. Of course, a lot of them are legal aid.

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, they might be referrals. I didn't mean that you had to answer them. They could be referrals.

Okay, well, I'll let you ponder that, and maybe you'll come up with some answers for me. We talked in our role playing about the human problem. Certainly, Bonnie felt it--wanting to help this woman, but not wanting to get too involved, or ask her too many questions, or get too personal; and she certainly didn't listen. That was brought out, and we all realized that Bonnie wasn't listening to what this woman was saying. Those are kind of two problems that we face with this kind of work.

VOLUNTEERING ON A SWITCHBOARD

Dodie King

Peggy O'Donnell

Switchboards have been an excellent example of the creative listeners, people who do listen to try and understand what the problem is, and also to try to advise or counsel and find the best source of help for these people who call in. So I wanted to get some switchboard people involved in this program, and I was very lucky to find someone who was a librarian as well as a switchboard volunteer, and that's Dodie King from the Redwood City Public Library. I asked her to comment on whether her library experience helped her on the switchboard, or whether the switchboard helped her in the library, or both. Dodie.

Ms. King

I'm a volunteer for the Project Outreach Switchboard in Redwood City. We answer to 365-CARE. I've been working 4 months, one shift a week for 4 hours at night; and I guess the kind of shift you work will determine somewhat the kinds of questions you will get.

We get all types of calls, and I've gotten most of the general types, except for drugs. I haven't had anybody call and say he has just taken a handful of red pills, what's going to happen? But during our training session we role played this and learned the emergency procedures for trying to get information out of somebody while he's still on the phone.

Our main type of call is loneliness. People are new in town and don't have anyone to go to, or they're lonely for whatever reason, and they just want to talk. That kind of a call will usually run for quite awhile, more than an hour, maybe 6; some of them run fairly long.

Depression is another type of call we get. Some of them are chronically depressed. They've been depressed for years. A lot of times they're in therapy, and they're on a prescribed drug, and it keeps them low. Like Thorazine, it keeps them pretty unexcited, and it depresses their outlook, and it makes it pretty hard for them to do anything, and that makes them further depressed, so they call the switchboard.

Fear: fear of going to a job, a panicky feeling--you know, a new job or a job you don't like; school problems; fear of being alone at night--there's nobody around, and it's just closing in on you.

General hassles between friends, family, parent and child, husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, boss and employee--that sort of thing.

Drugs include information as far as overdoses or symptoms. If I take too much of this drug, what's going to happen to me? We have a book at the switchboard that we don't have at the library. Some libraries have it--*Physician's Desk Reference*--but we don't happen to have it at the library. The switchboard was the first place I've run into it. I know how to look up things better than anybody else because I know about indexes, but everybody else can find their way around OK.

Suicide calls at the various levels from "I've got a gun here pointed at my head," to "I've been thinking about suicide for a long time," and all the levels in between. One of the main things on a suicide call is to first determine what level the person is at. If the person has only been thinking about it--he doesn't happen to have the gun or the pills right there, whatever--chances are he just needs somebody to talk to for awhile. I haven't had anybody with a gun at his head yet. I won't know how I'll react to that until it happens.

I had one that was an imminent, 24-hour thing though, and it really shook me up. It was my first type of call like that. The person was talking about the fact that he had been thinking about this for months, had been thinking about nothing else. This had been his whole concentration for months. He was going to kill himself the next morning. I felt very helpless, because I couldn't get any emotional response from the person. He was on Thorazine. This is one of those examples, and it was the hardest kind of question that I've handled so far. It's when the people don't have any emotional output. They're either so depressed that they can't react, or they're on a drug that keeps them so depressed they can't react; and there's no anger, no fear. There's nothing, and there's nothing to react to. We're trained to listen to the feeling, and there's no feeling. For me it was a discouraging call, and I felt very worried. I immediately turned around and talked to two other switchboard volunteers who were there, and laid out all my problems on them, so that I didn't go home worried about it. Well, I did go home and worry about it for 24 hours. Apparently the person did not commit suicide, but that was my first call like that, and I wasn't all that sure of myself, because I felt like I couldn't make that much contact with a human being; but all that person wanted was to tell somebody he was thinking about it, apparently.

We are expanding into sexuality a lot more than we had been. We've always handled calls like, "I'm pregnant, or I think I'm pregnant; how can I find out? I don't want my parents to know." Or, "I am pregnant; I want an abortion," or "I'm pregnant, and I don't want an abortion," or "I'm pregnant, and I don't know what I want." Those are usually the two kinds of calls--where can I go, and then the feelings behind it. "Well, this is where you can go. This is what they'll do, and this is how the test is run. Confidentiality is maintained. You don't have to worry about that. You sound worried. You sound scared." "Yes, I am scared." You explore the alternatives or whatever it is that's on the person's mind.

VD is another thing we get a lot of calls on, people wondering, "What are the symptoms? I think I have it. What should I do?" Or there's a reluctance to have tests run, though not just because of the fear of being exposed, because it's a confidential sort of thing; but because if they have VD--and sometimes he'll give you his symptoms over the phone, and it's pretty obvious that he probably does--then there are other people involved. He doesn't want to have to tell his wife, but chances are she's got it too. You know, it's terribly important that she knows before she's sterile.

Problems with sex--this is kind of a new thing for the switchboard. We've had some workshops on it. We've had speakers in from San Francisco. There's sort of a drop-in center on the State College campus, and there's a fairly new sex switchboard. We've had these people come and talk to us. We haven't handled a whole lot of that yet, so it was hard for us to think up questions to ask, like, what do you do if somebody's asked for this kind of information. But they did talk about some of their typical types of questions. They get the typical kinds of questions that Masters and Johnson do--impotence, non-orgasmic women, that sort of thing. I guess we're hoping to develop a technique for handling that type of question on the phone to give them a type of counseling. They were demonstrating how they can do it over the phone, the kinds of questions they can ask--you know: What kind of situation was this? How do you feel? Has this ever happened to you before?

We do have calls on alcoholism, but this is kind of a problem. There isn't very much you can do for an alcoholic. There's Alcoholics Anonymous, and there's a Half Way House in Redwood City. If somebody you're with or that you know has a drinking problem and happens to be in really bad shape--very drunk, or sick, which is a lot of times the case--it's hard to find a place for him. The people on the switchboard talked about it, and this is one of the areas where we really feel weak. We really don't know where to advise people to take this person. They can try going to the county hospital, but they have to be really stubborn and really adamant sometimes to get them into a ward for treatment, or just to take care of them that night.

Oh, something interesting on drugs that I was told to tell people: If somebody calls and his friend's on the floor--you know, out--check for vital signs and all that; call an ambulance; stay on the phone while the ambulance is there, if you can; talk to the caller--you know, keep in contact; but tell that person to be sure to get rid of any drugs he may have around there. The police may follow or be with them. Also, I guess--I don't know how local or statewide a law this is--but if the stomach is pumped and a drug found in the stomach, the doctor can turn that over as evidence, and it is admissable evidence. So the person may be facing a bust, which is kind of a bad thing when he has other problems too. It sort of depends on the level of cooperation between the different agencies, like the police and the hospitals and the switchboards.

We get a lot of miscellaneous and general information calls--people just asking, "What do you do?" A lot of times people will start out with, "I heard about you on the radio," or, "I saw your card," or something like that--"I just wanted to know what you do." So we tell them, "We're here; if you've got problems, we'll talk to you about them, or give you some places to go if you need them, and just to talk to you." That's the part people won't believe. We sometimes have to say that a few times to convince them that even if they don't have anything special to talk about, or if they have what they consider sort of a small, dumb, kind of ridiculous problem, that's OK; they're not wasting our time. At the reference desk you get the same kind of thing with people saying, "This is really a dumb question, but..." A lot of times those are really the worst. I mean, they are really hard to find answers to. And sometimes they are dumb; but we try not to agree with them.

I went into the switchboard with a lot of apprehension. I was really afraid I couldn't handle it. I didn't know. I had never handled a crisis situation, and I've never known anyone who was about to commit suicide when I was anywhere around them. In fact, anybody I knew who had thought about suicide, had fortunately thought about it when I was nowhere in the state, or years before I had known them, or long after I had seen them last. Gee, I never even had a friend drunk on me. I just had never faced a situation like that. I'd never done role playing. I'd answered reference questions, and that was about as close as I got. I've listened to my own friends and talked to my family about problems, but it was hard during the training to initially put myself in a position of doing role plays, and to figure out what a person was feeling, what he needed, what I could say that could help him. But after a few times it wasn't nearly as frightening. Naturally, it's like anything else. Once you get used to it, it's not so bad. That doesn't mean that when the phone rings I don't kind of tense up. If somebody starts out, "I'm going to commit suicide," part of me goes into a catatonic state, and the rest of me just goes, "Uh huh," and that lets them know that I'm listening, but I can still sort of back off and regain my bearings, and realize that I'm going to have to listen for certain feelings and try to draw them out, and realize that I'll probably wish I had done it differently later, wish I had asked this question instead of the one I did ask. But I don't feel that as much as I thought I would, because there isn't any kind of a formula to follow, which is comforting.

The technique of listening is the thing that we were drilled on most and what the role plays were mostly for when we were training. The training was 4 or 6 weeks, for 8 hours a week, two 4-hour sessions. We'd have a speaker; then we'd do role plays on different aspects of listening. Peggy called it creative listening. I've never heard that one, but it amounts to the same--creative listening, empathy training, listening skills. You listen to what the person is feeling more than just to what he is saying. If somebody says, "It's really awful outside. I hate to go outside today because it's so bad," you can say, "Yeah, it really is awful out," or, if their voice gives enough away, you can say, "It sounds like you're really worried about it." That may be jumping to conclusions at that point, but that kind of thing--play on their feelings. Feed the feelings back to them--what you feel them saying, feed back, even if you use the same words. "I feel scared." "You sound scared." The thing is, the person isn't really listening to what you're saying. He picks up on the fact that you're listening to him when you say things like that. He will think you're very perceptive, and he will begin pouring out more. He will think that you understand, and he will actually say, "How did you know that? How are you so perceptive?"--not realizing that he has been saying it all along, though maybe not in those words; and all you've done is just turned it around for him so that he can see that you understand what he is saying.

People call just for information a lot of times--you know, at 12:00 at night, "Where can I crash?" Well, we're not a drop-in center, so we have the problem of what to do with these people out on the street at night, if they can't get up to

San Mateo where there is a drop-in center. We do get some information calls, like on that sheet, "How do I get on welfare?"--that kind of thing. Or, "My husband's an alcoholic," or, "I'm an alcoholic," or, "We're both alcoholics." That's a very common thing, and it usually recurs. A lot of these people become regulars, as we call them, like patrons. They call once, and then they call back. They call back a lot of times with the same problem.

A number of the people are already under therapy. They go to therapy sessions any number of times a week, with groups, or they have private therapy. Sometimes a person is satisfied with his therapist, and sometimes he can't stand his therapist. We can't do too much about that, once a person is in therapy. He needs somebody to talk to in between times too. I find it kind of a sticky situation, in a way. If a person is under a therapist's care, I can't cure anything over the phone, that's for sure. All I can hope to do, if I can, is make him feel like it's been worth calling. Somebody called, had a fear, the fear of being alone, and had been under therapy for some time. I can't remember if it was a year or 3 years. He had parents or family and had people he lived with, and had never told any of them of this fear of being alone at night. He called a complete stranger and happened to get me, because I answered, and he laid it all on me right away. Then he got up enough nerve to call his therapist, which is really what he wanted to do, and told her, and then called back. We had a terrific conversation about old movies that we liked, old horror movies--had I seen Godzilla Meets Bambi?

During training somebody will say, "You will find that you care, whatever your initial reaction is. Like I said, I go into this withdrawal state before I get myself together sometimes, and it doesn't take very long after that that I really start caring about what heppens to this person. If he walked into the library, I really don't know if I could say I'd get that kind of feeling from him. There are so many different pressures. There are other people waiting at the reference desk, phone calls; there's the whole thing of being businesslike. I think it makes it much harder. At least I haven't been able to transfer any of what I do at the switchboard as a volunteer to handling a reference question--if I'm under pressure. If I'm not under pressure, then it's easier. Sure, anybody who's ever answered questions for the public feels that way. There are times when you just can hardly stand to look a person in the face and answer another question. At other times, when you really strike up a bond, and you really want to help that person, you really care what happens. Well, at the switchboard this happens more often. You really do care.

Earlier this morning someone reported on training for information specialists where they worked for community service agencies at the library. A lot of them dropped out of the library service. I can see why. I felt somewhat the same. The library seems so much more superficial. At a switchboard you're not only working with other people's feelings, but you're working with your own.

One of the first things you learn is that when you're listening to someone, make sure that you know how you're feeling yourself. You may be extremely uncomfortable and not realize how it's interfering with your call. So get in touch with your own feelings. Maybe your own feelings, whatever they are, interfere so much that you just can't help them; and you tell them. You know, "I really want to help you, but I just can't help you; but So and So is here, and I think he'll be able to help you. Would you like to talk to him?" Usually they will. Sometimes they'll specify that they don't want to talk to a male or a female--they'll have sexual preferences--but there's usually enough volunteers now that we can take care of that.

I had the fear of crisis calls when I started. As I mentioned before, I never had any experience with it. Role playing helped that somewhat, and then, of course, the first real calls that had to be handled immediately made a difference.

There was one I had a forewarning on. When we were doing the sexuality training session, I didn't think there was much that would upset me or cause any kind of uncomfortable reaction. I thought through all the things I could think of, all the different kinds of calls, which didn't turn out to be very many--I just wasn't very inventive. So the people who were helping us on this session, and the more experienced volunteers were also in on these sessions--brought up some of the kinds of questions they had actually gotten, and I was amazed. One that really bothered me, and I had to think about it for a long time, was, what do you do when somebody calls you up on the phone and is masturbating. You know, homosexuality doesn't bother me, and all these sexual acts don't bother me. That one bothered me, and I went home and thought about it. I thought about it for weeks. Not too long ago I got a call. By this time I was prepared, and I was really glad that somebody months ago thought to bring this up, because--I don't know; I might have hung up or given the call to someone else. I would have been extremely uncomfortable. As it was, it was treated like anything else. It turned out that he was uncomfortable and hung up. But that was a discovery of something in myself. I didn't realize that bothered me.

Some people react that way to homosexuality, particularly males; they'll admit it. During training session they'll say they haven't quite got that straightened out. Or alcoholics—there are people who don't like handling alcoholics. They don't even like to talk to them over the phone. That role play of the staff meeting here pointed that out. Your own feelings have a lot to do with how you handle a person in front of you.

I personally get uncomfortable if someone asks me for business information. I flounder a lot. No matter how much time I spend, it just seems to pluck my mind right out, and I have to go through the learning process every time. As long as I can find a place to start, that's not so bad; but when I don't even know where to start, it's like learning to be a new reference librarian all over again. I'm uncomfortable with it, and I know I don't do as well with those questions as I do with a lot of others. I would much rather have somebody come in and ask me any kind of crisis question, I think--as long as it wasn't that his business was failing.

As far as the kind of things that the library and the switchboard have in common or don't have in common: I haven't handled anything exciting at the library yet, but the sort of thing I came across in working with the switchboard, at least when I was at the library I knew how to get hold of it if I needed it. Now that Georgia's community resource file is at our library (yesterday I read through it from start to finish), I can see now that the library has information that the switchboard volunteers ought to know about, and I'm going to bring it to their attention, because there hasn't been any kind of work done between the two agencies. I guess I was kind of incognito for awhile. I was masquerading as a student, or something like that, because most of the volunteers are students. Now that people know I'm a librarian, they still don't know what I do. They ask occasionally, or they tell me they have a book overdue. At least they tell me that; they don't think I'm going to take it away from them. I may make a plea to get it back if it's been 3 months, but I don't give them any trouble about it. But they still wouldn't think of coming to the library for the kinds of information available there. I'd like to see that change. I think it should change.

At the library I don't see how we can handle the 2 to 4 to 6-hour rap call, for whatever reason the person is calling, unless it's a freakish thing. If it's a suicide call, and you need to be on the line that long to somebody, I don't care who it is or where you are when he calls, I think you have an obligation to do what you can to stay on that call. If I was at the reference desk, I would get somebody else to take my place and continue the call if I could. Generally, you're not going to get too many calls of chronic depression at the library, or loneliness, or that sort of thing. You'll get calls that normally have some kind of answer at the other end, not making a decision like, "Should I break up with my boyfriend," or "Where can I go to get help for my alcoholic husband." This involves doing the listening thing, listening for feelings, plus that little reference interview of, "What kind of information do you really need?" How do you get that to a person without making it sound like you're checking off a form? It's a real temptation to fall into that. I have to fight that in myself anyway. I guess some people don't have that trouble. Sometimes people will call the switchboard to ask a question, and I catch myself slipping back into the librarian's role, and I almost answer, "Reference desk."

I would like to see the day when somebody calls the library--and gets an answer to the question, "I have a pimple on my belly button; I think it's VD; what do I do?"

Well, you tell him what the other symptoms could be, and in this case, it's not too likely; but never rule out the possibility. Tell them what the other symptoms are. Tell him to check it out. If he has any symptom, he should see a doctor. If he is really worried, tell him how easy it is to get a test, and how much better he'll feel after he has it. Also tell him a little bit about prevention. It doesn't hurt to throw that in, if you can.

After the caller has presented his problem to you, and has listened to you for awhile, he will reach his own decision. You don't decide it for him. He'll reach his own decision if you just sit there feeding back what he says. Some people have extremely clear-minded views of what they want, but they won't know that. After about 15 or 20 minutes, or an hour, they begin to realize that they've been consistent in what they've said, and their decision is made for them. Those are beautiful, classic calls, and I love them, because they go just like the role plays were supposed to have gone. They say something, and you say, "You're feeling this way," or "You sound this way," or "You sound pretty happy where you are now; you don't want to change," or "You feel like you're pressured." At the end, he'll say, "I know what I have to do; I know what my decision is. Thanks a lot for helping me." And you haven't told him a thing that he didn't already tell you. That makes me feel terrific. I can go on with those kinds of calls for a long time; They're very rewarding.

When we were doing a sexuality workshop, I discovered something I didn't know about my own community. The question has never been asked at the library. It's another question that I hope is asked. It just happens to be a sexuality type of thing. "Where do I go to meet other gay people?" "Where do I go to the gay bars?" "Where's the closest lesbian bar?" I discovered Redwood City has a lesbian bar. I wasn't taking notes, but I know how to contact the person to get that information if I ever need it again. There are lots of things: "Who's playing at Winterland this weekend?" There's a number you can call. Here in the city you're probably aware of this, but as you get farther down the peninsula, people aren't aware of where you can get that kind of information.

I hope that the library will take on--well, not just hope; I think it should, and I feel very strongly--that the library should take on more of this role, especially the referral and information, but also the crisis sort of thing. I think every person who answers a phone in the library, no matter what their status is, librarian or otherwise, should have some kind of training--it can be an hour's worth--on handling a crisis call. There are general things you do, and there are specific things you do, and I think you ought to know how to do it, because that panicky feeling can close off everything in your mind if you've never faced it before. Some of you may have had more of that crisis stuff hit you than I've actually had, but it makes a big difference to at least have practiced what to think about, what to do, and how to do it. Keep your voice calm if the caller is excited. Keep it calm even if he's not excited. Depending on the situation, find out what's happening. Find out who to call if there's a need for a doctor, or a hospital, or an ambulance right away.

In our area it turns out that the fire department rescue unit is faster (and free) than an ambulance. So in our area the best thing to do, naturally, is call the fire department first. There is a resuscitator unit that's portable, and very highly trained people, and it's free. Somebody's got to pay for that ambulance bill eventually. These are things that it helps you to know about ahead of time, because you're not going to think of them at the time.

What things do you do, if there is anything to do, while you're waiting for the ambulance to come, if that's what you're waiting for? If it's a suicide call, that's a different sort of thing. If it's an eminent suicide call, that's a very tense sort of thing, I think. I don't see how anybody could be blasé about that, unless, of course, it's sort of a defense thing--you know, "My God, it's so awful; I'm hanging up!" But most people, I think, are going to feel somewhat involved, and have to handle it and diffuse that person, at least for the time being, and maybe then be able to refer the person somewhere for help. One of the things that we do have in our file is where people can go for counseling, anywhere from the county mental health people to a rather unstructured organization in Redwood City where you can just walk in and get counseling. Students do the counseling, but an awful lot of people use it. It's free; there's no big hassle; it's a fairly congenial atmosphere.

One thing that we do a lot more at the switchboard than at the library is to ask them to call back. Sometimes I feel like a split personality. I remember to do that at the switchboard, but I hardly ever remember to do that at the library. I don't know if it's that I'm trying to get away from it there, or if it just hasn't been part of my habit; but that's an important thing any time you give referrals. I'm sure anybody would agree that it's important, but doing it is something else. It's getting used to it; it's a habit. At the switchboard you're more involved, I think, and so you do care. You say, "I hope this helps, and I hope you'll call back to let us know." At the library there's usually another call waiting, or there's 3 unfinished questions, and it's sometimes hard to think of.

One of the very first questions I got when I started at the switchboard was about 10:00 at night. The phone rang, and somebody asked me how to spell a word. I felt really strange for a minute, trying to figure out where I was. Then I almost referred them to the Berkeley After Hours reference service, of all things, from Redwood City. There was no dictionary around, and a librarian without a dictionary trying to spell a word--this was serious. But I did the best I could, and the person seemed absolutely satisfied. She told me who she was, and it turned out that she had been one of our regular callers before I had become a switchboard member. She had been a constant caller for, I guess, about 6 months. She had had a whole lot of things happen in her life that were very hard for her to handle. One of the things she relied on was the switchboard. There were times when, I guess, she was very down, very worried, very unsure of what she could do, much less what she ought to do. When I talked to her, I got the reward end of it, I guess. All these other people had helped her, and I got all the good stuff. She was telling me how good everything was going for her, how she had gotten a job, was able to support her kids, how she had made an adjustment. The fact that her husband had walked out on her--you know, she was beginning to understand that he had his own problems, and she couldn't understand them, and he didn't want her to, apparently. But she had made this adjustment after a time. She sounded terrific; she was happy; it was obvious from her call. I felt terrific after I finished talking to her. In that case, I just answered her question, which was, "How do I spell this word?"

That's the type of thing that people often use, just like they do in libraries--"Where are the books on birds?" Well, they want to know about a specific disease of a parakeet. That happens at switchboards--"Where can I find information on...", or, "I've got this problem," and there will be this big gap of time. It will take a long time before it comes out that they think they have VD, and they want to know how to get it treated.

I look forward to the day when people will not only think about calling the library, but do call, and ask them the same kinds of questions in reverse. In other words, she asked me a library type question. I'll be glad when somebody calls the library and asks a switchboard type question, and he gets the kind of answer he deserves to get. Any questions?

Question from audience

How many phones do you have, and about how many volunteers at a time?

Ms. King

Almost every shift, which are 4 hours, except the overnight which is an 8-hour shift, has at least two volunteers. There are usually more people in the place than that. There are 3 telephones and 3 lines, and the phones have extra long cords. It's a very funky place; it's not at all like the library--second-hand furniture, orange and white paint, and it's usually a considerable mess--coffee cups, ashtrays, and that sort of thing. We're always cleaning up. Physically you can get two of the phones completely closed off, and the third one you can take into a corner, if there are 3 calls and you need that much privacy. I think there are 50 volunteers, and there's a new training group starting tonight.

Question

Would you like to comment on the relative anonymity or facelessness that somebody calling into the switchboard has, regardless of whether they give you their name or you give them your name? Doesn't this have some bearing on how open and free they are?

Ms. King

Yes. Some people would feel more comfortable, I think, face to face; but for most of them, a telephone is as close as they can get to somebody at that moment, whatever it is that they've got bothering them. For some of them it's a long-term thing. For a long time all they can do is telephone. It makes it much easier than having to walk in and face somebody and look them in the eye. Some people feel the other way around. There are cases when you'll get a call where you want to be able to look at the person or he wants to be able to look at you. That can be frustrating. But I think, in the long run, the anonymity of the telephone is a plus factor.

Question

Do you find any cultural differences, for instance, between those who want to see you face to face and those who want to remain anonymous?

Ms. King

I really don't know about that. Sometimes it's hard to tell the culture over the phone, but sometimes you can, or sometimes the caller says. In general, it's pretty hard to tell. I suspect that most of our callers are white, middle-class people. Those are the type of people that live in the area for the most part. We have talked about having somebody who could handle Spanish, but we don't get the Spanish community calling in. So far this hasn't happened. Nobody really knows how to speak Spanish well enough even to refer.

Question

I'm kind of interested in the training, especially the type of training that you got. Since you work in a library, do you feel that type of training has helped you in your work?

Ms. King

Yes I do, and I never really thought about it, I guess, until yesterday when I started worrying a lot about today. I started thinking how helpful it might be to have some kind of training similar, maybe not as intensive or anything like that, but something for the staff in the library. I think it would be useful.

Question

Could you talk more about what the training consisted of? Did you actually pick up the phone and practice that way?

Ms. King

No, we didn't have phones to pick up. In general, the large group would meet and hear a speaker. The speaker would be on a different topic each week. The first one was just on listening skills. We had one on depression; it was very depressing. We had one on suicide, one on crisis from the Crisis Intervention Center in San Mateo County, one on drugs, one on sexuality, and I think that was all that we had then. Maybe they've expanded a little bit. They would speak for an hour or so; there would be a break, and then for approximately 2 hours we divided up into small groups of 4 to 6 people, with 2 trainers. These are volunteers who had been working on the phones. Then for 2 hours or so we would do role playing on the situation we covered that night, always using the empathy kind of thing. If it was drugs that night, we did as many drug situations as we could think of, and we'd rate each other. It could be brutal, but it wasn't. You talk about how you think you did, how you think the other person did, how you as an observer think you both did. You evaluate as you go along, so you're constantly getting feedback all the time.

Question

Do the volunteers meet together to discuss the problems they've had and how they can help each other?

Ms. King

There are weekly meetings, and there are usually things brought up at that time, a call that somebody's had trouble with, and how could I handle this, a regular caller that you aren't sure how to handle, giving you problems or making threats--that does happen; we've had threats of physical violence--and how to deal with this. I guess it's like anything. There's only a core group that comes to the meetings, but there is a chance to talk about it during the meetings.

Question

Are you on the phone most of each of your shifts?

Ms. King

It varies a lot. During December there was a very slow period, and we didn't get very many calls. During January we got all kinds of calls. I'd say at least half the time, at least two hours are solid phone calls, even on a fairly quiet night. That's with another volunteer there too, so we get maybe 4 hours of phone calls.

Question

Is there much of a drop-out rate with the people that volunteer to do this during the training session?

Ms. King

I don't think so--oh, during the training session? Well, not too high a drop-out rate, no. They haven't had any screening procedures until this group that's just starting where they interview the people beforehand. A lot of places,especially a place like Suicide Prevention does very heavy screening prior to it, and the switchboard didn't. But even with it, I don't know the percentage of the drop-out rate, but it's not very high.

Question

Have you had any kind of rumor crisis?

Ms. King

I don't think so, not yet. It has only been in operation a little over a year, and only 8 or 9 months for 24 hours a day. I don't think during that time they've had that sort of thing. I never thought about that before. That's the sort of thing we should be prepared for, if it happens.

Question

You mentioned suicide prevention, and you also mentioned handling drug crises. It's been my experience on the general switchboard that you can't possibly give all the volunteers enough training in suicide handling and in drugs and keep them informed in all the other areas, and expect them to be competent in all these areas. Do you have the capacity to switch over to suicide prevention in the middle of a call, as our switchboard did? Does your switchboard have the capability of setting up conference calls if needed?

Ms. King

I think technically we can't. I know that in tracing calls, it takes so long, and it's such a hard thing, but it very seldom happens. The conference calls--I don't think we've ever had that happen. We've had the situation where you put someone on hold while you dial someone else, and that back and forth sort of thing, but I don't think we've ever set up a conference call.

Ms. O'Donnell

I want to thank you very much, Dodie. This has been just great.

HOW TO EVALUATE INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Regina Minudri

Peggy O'Donnell

When I was preparing for this workshop, and the word got out what it was going to be on, I heard from members of the Bay Area SRRT that they were in the process of doing a survey, and many of you know Bay Area SRRT surveys. This particular survey was an evaluation of library service in the sense that we talk a lot about our services; and we have a lot of inspirational ideas, but actually, how good is it? So they designed and put into effect a survey of library effectiveness in answering all kinds of questions. This afternoon we have Regina Minudri with us, and she's going to report on that survey.

Ms. Minudri

Well, happy love day. SRRT is a group of people, as you all know, and some of them happen to be librarians. Some of them are library school students. As Peggy said, we wanted to find out, in other words, where it's at. This is a non-judgmental, not telling who does what, type of thing. Nobody's trying to give a report card on any particular library. Nobody's making any value judgments on the library's competence or lack of such. We really were concerned with our strengths and weaknesses, and whether our mouths were saying--or, let's see, whether our hands were doing--what we said we did.

Anyway, what we really did, and this is a collective thing as most SRRT things are, and I don't want to take credit for it; I wouldn't want to take the blame, and I don't want to take anybody else's credit; it's a collective thing, and we decided what we would do would be to get fifteen people to ask questions of the ten large public libraries in the metropolitan Bay Area. We wanted to find out from these 15 questions the kinds of answers that people got, and what I'm going to talk to you today about is really preliminary. The questions were asked during the last weeks of January. Now, you can imagine, with ten libraries responding to fifteen questions, that we have a tremendous amount of information to distill; and in order to make this meaningful, we have to assign something to it.

So the survey questions, which I'm going to read to you later--the surveyors were asked to kind of rate the answers, like: Was your question satisfactorily answered? How was it? Was it a direct referral to an agency or a group? Was it a referral to a switchboard? Were you referred to another library? Was there some other kind of referral? Second: How many times were you transferred within that library before you got an answer? Third: Was your question treated with courtesy and concern? Fourth: Were you given too much information? Did the library tell you more about whatever it was than you really wanted to know? Fifth: Did the librarian ask you to phone her or him back if you didn't find what you needed? That's kind of a sore point. Sixth: Was there a directory or resource in the community that could have answered your question? Seventh: Follow-up--did the group or agency the library referred you to still exist, and could it answer your question? In other words, did you find out what you really wanted?

It seems to me that in many places I have worked, rather than having people call the library back, the library prefers to call them back with an answer; but for obvious reasons in this kind of survey, we were requesting that we call back. I'm sure you can understand why.

Alright, here are the questions. Where can I get abortion counselling? Where are there alternative schools to send my daughter? I'm having trouble with my landlord; are there any tenant right groups in town? I want to join a gay women's group; are there any in the area? I want to join a rock band; how can I find out which groups need drummers? I need help for an ex-prisoner, or a prisoner's family. Are there any child care centers in town? Can you suggest a drug counselling group for my daughter? Do you own this X-rated book? VD information? Where can I get information on vasectomies? I'm a secretary in a local company, and we want to start a union; who can help me get organized? Is the lettuce boycott still on, and what kind of lettuce? Are there any gardening clubs in town? (That, by the way, was the control question.) Are there any classes in Spanish for natural childbirth training?

Now, many of these questions, I think, could be answered from many different sources; but the interesting points are what kind of response the people calling got from the libraries called. Now, on the whole, the response from the librarians was positive, and the librarians really showed concern and wanted to answer the questions. However, there were several libraries that were glaringly bad. As we said at lunch, if the shoe fits, put your stocking in it. So we're still drawing our conclusions, but here are some of the kinds of things.

Certain kinds of questions were consistently and courteously answered by everybody. O[illegible] got consistently bad response. Example, VD. Quick facts everybody knew. They could tell you right away where to go and who to see; but abortion counselling was consistently given unfriendly and unhelpful response, with two out of ten libraries saying, "You can't get that information in the library." The vasectomy question got good response, but our control question, the gardening clubs, gave a good many of the libraries a considerable amount of trouble, which is rather interesting.

From the point of view of the response of those conducting the survey, we found that the students did a better job than the librarians did in reporting their surveys. We really found that the response was so varied from many of the libraries that the expectations of the people who did the survey didn't always conform to the results. As I said, insofar as what we felt would be easy questions, for many of the libraries turned out to be hard, and vice-versa.

About 50% of the questions required a second call. They couldn't be answered the first time. Most libraries relied very heavily on the People's Yellow Pages, which is really neat. It has a lot of good information, especially for these kinds of questions. However, there were some local publications, which even the largest public library--and these, remember, are only the large public libraries in the Bay Area--should be getting, but they don't obviously, because they were unable to answer the questions. I think one of these particularly, was the one about the rock band. My obvious first response to this would be Rolling Stone ads, but there are a lot of things available. Radio station KOME has something, and there are several other sources, but I've been out of this long enough now that I'm not familiar with them myself.

As I said, this is really a preliminary report. There are some people here who worked on the survey, and I'm sure they would not mind at all answering any questions they could, without mentioning names, of course. Are there any of the questions that I mentioned that any of you would like to comment on?

Question

I just want to ask a question first. How can you judge this as the library, and not just the librarian who has answered it?

Ms. Minudri

How would a patron judge the library?

Comment

That's what we have to be careful about, not making a blanket statement about libraries, because I can see on any library staff the whole range of answering types.

Ms. Minudri

As a matter of fact, we requested that the surveyors not call the library during lunch or dinner times, that they call the libraries at hours which would be peak staffing times, so that there should be trained personnel on the desk. What we were trying to do was to put ourselves in the place of the patron, to find out how the patron would feel. I know how I feel sometimes in dealing with other public agencies, trying to find somebody.

Does anybody want to comment who was working on the survey on how many times they were referred without an answer?

Comment

I took the abortion question, and I got some of the nastiest answers around. I want to say one thing--some libraries have got the information, and often the people who answer the phone aren't the librarians, and they'll say, "I don't know what department to give you to", and hang up. Or, "You can't get that kind of information in the library." Well, you can, but if you've got a non-professional answering the phone, be sure they know what you've got, or who to connect them with.

Ms. Minudri

Again, the vital bit about how to answer the telephone. Let's see, some of the students I see in the back. What questions did you guys have? Which one did you have--the prison one? How did you do on that?

Comment [Cannot be heard.]

Ms. Minudri

Again the expectations didn't conform to what you thought.

Probably to say that this is an evaluation of information or referral services is really not quite accurate. It's only a partial survey of only a few libraries and only a few questions; but I think it can give us an indication of where strengths can be. One of the first things that seemed to me quite obvious was how people do take care of the phone, and how people feel about phone questions, and whether they're considered important or not. Some libraries don't regard the person on the phone as important as the person face to face. There's a lot of discussion about that in lots of places.

One of the things I think that really was important that came out was that practically no library seemed concerned as to whether or not the person got the correct information. As Dodie said earlier, they didn't say--or did anyone? Now, maybe I'm making a blanket statement here. Did anyone doing the survey find that when they were given an agency to call, the librarian requested them to call back if they did not get what they wanted? Nancy, did you find that?

Nancy

One library.

Ms. Minudri

Good; anybody else? One of these lovely generalizations was just shot down, but it really is important that we seem to care whether or not the question is answered. I don't think I did this when I did reference. Maybe this is something we need to remember.

Question

What about referrals to other agencies? Were they up to date and accurate?

Ms. Minudri

How were they, Sue? Have you tabulated that part yet?

Sue Critchfield

I'd say there was a bigger percentage of referrals than there should have been. Possibly about 1/3 of the referrals that they gave generally in libraries, either it was a wrong referral in that, indeed, they didn't have this information, or the place was disconnected a year ago, or it moved to another town, and a good many of them weren't around any longer. The important point about phoning back is that some other patron may be asking the same questions, and there's no point in referring to the same place over and over again if it went out of business five years ago.

Ms. Minudri

Yes, and how are we going to find out before giving out the wrong information if somebody doesn't tell us? This is kind of important. Is there anything else anybody wants to say? Sue, do you want to say a little bit more, since you're compiling this? You have all the sheets. How thick is your pile of information?

Sue Critchfield

Well, I just thought it was an interesting survey. I think all of the SRRT people thought a lot about libraries being information centers, and we were interested as to just how public libraries, particularly larger public libraries in the Bay Area, stood in terms of being partially information centers already. One of the interesting things that I found that came out of it, being a reference librarian at BARC myself--it was like the role-playing that was done earlier. Some of the questions handled might have been answered if the reference technique were better on the phone. For example, the gardening club, which I thought was a perfect little control quesiton, was really interesting. In several cases, the librarian would get off the phone and be off the phone for a lengthy period of time trying to find the information, then come back and give the patron the name of a fuchsia society. Then the librarian phoning would say, "Well, gee; I don't really like fuchsias; let me have a little broader organization." But in reference technique, the librarian should have said,"What kind of gardening are you interested in? Do you dig fuchsias, or begonias, or organic gardening?" A lot of that came through, that indeed, there might have been answers if the person--and this has nothing to do with being an information center per se, just in being a good reference interviewer. I think that was an interesting point.

Ms. Minudri

Do you have anything yet on how many times people were referred around within the library, like how many departments you had to be referred to? I know one of the girls had to be referred to four different departments before they finally got one that said, "Well, you'd better call another library."

Ms. Critchfield

Well, something interesting came out of it. Most of the libraries around do have subject departments, and so I was interested as to how many times--particularly embarrassing questions, like vasectomies, abortion, VD--how many times you had to ask it before you finally gave up. Most of the time there wasn't that much transferring around. I tend to have a feeling that sometimes you get a younger person on a general reference type of desk that wouldn't dream of transferring that question to the old goat in the sociology department, and will try to answer it. But a lot of the returns I got on the survey had the distinct impression that the person was going to transfer them, but then said, "Wait a minute; maybe I'd better answer the question myself, because you may not get the kind of treatment you deserve." They felt that they were younger and would rather answer it themself instead of transferring, although it probably technically should be transferred. That was kind of interesting.

The last thing I wanted to say that came out was that it was kind of hard to do this kind of survey, because we're all into libraries, and most of us, except for the students, are trained to be librarians and do the reference bit, that it was very hard to put yourself into the place of a very timid, or confused, or a problem person in the community, calling the library maybe for the first time. So a good many of the librarians tended to be a little more pushy than I think a lot of the public would be. They couldn't believe that the library didn't have the information, so they'd say, "Are you sure you don't have anything? So it was a sympathetic sort of thing, and everybody was sort of rooting for the librarian.

Question

Regina, we've been sitting here, and we decided that we're one of the libraries, and we feel we have about twenty hours reference time invested in this project. So is there any way that the libraries that were selected could get a private session? I'm really serious. I do feel we have time invested in this. We treated it as a legitimate question, and in a way, at a busy time of the year, you sort of begrudge those twenty hours--you know, in a very small way. I think it's a very good survey, but I hate to see us not be able to get something back.

Ms. Minudri

In other words, you'd like a confidential report. I think it's something that the committee needs to consider very seriously. We didn't want to name any names, because we didn't feel it was proper to, at this point, cite anything; but I don't see why an individual library can't get the information.

Ms. O'Donnell

I just wanted to say something, because what you say, really, I think this is just a learning process, and I don't know that twenty hours invested is a bad thing. In BARC we have a particular situation with the Bay Area Reference Center listing in the San Francisco phone book. Everybody thinks we're the General Reference Department. This has been going on for several years, and when we first got those calls they were for General Reference. I mean, any information call was for General Reference, and everybody just quickly said, "Hold on, and we'll transfer you to General Reference." Now our entire staff, which is half professional and half non-professional in the upstairs office, is very attuned to this, and we hope we transfer them to the right place. We just don't write them off to General Reference. We feel that they've got us, and the patrons don't understand that it's an administrative office, but we had to learn that. Our first thing was, "Well, it's not our question; it's not our business; we'll transfer it to General Reference." But I think sometimes when you become aware of how you sound--you know, there was a rush time, and you didn't have time to do it, so you just get rid of it. Everybody has invested a lot of time on one case where I think somebody actually went downstairs and did the question, but that's extraordinary. I think it's important that this comes out.

Comment

Something that I've been concerned about down in my system is when you call a library, particularly if you have direct dial, how many times does the user not really know which direct number to call, and as a result, really have to be switched around? I wonder whether the data that you collected might indicate that a central telephone number for the whole library with somebody there who knows exactly where to switch the call would be beneficial?

Ms. Minudri

I think so. I think having a good switchboard that knows where to direct things is extremely important, because people did find that they were shifted around, and sometimes they didn't know where they ended up.

Mr. McNamee

This is sort of on the subject, I think. Does SRRT have any plans to do any person-to-person calling on libraries and asking these questions? The reason I ask this is because for a long while, I've operated under the theory that the person using the phone asking a reference question got better service than if you came to the library, because the person on the phone got the reference librarian to look up in the Reader's Guide, etc., but if you came in in person, they'd say, "There's the Reader's Guide; look at it." I'm wondering--I don't know if this has anything to do with it. I don't know who you would pick to ask the question--your mother, or...

Ms. Minudri

As a matter of fact, there was somebody's mother who did the calling in one instance. That could be worth exploring, too. I'm trying to get a little feedback in how our attitudes are. I think it's important, too, to realize whether you as an individual answering the question are putting some sort of value judgment on the question as the question is asked. We do it all the time, especially like with the abortion one that came up. It's the difference between being involved and making a judgment, and you can do both.

Question [Cannot be heard]

Ms. Minudri

I don't know what I'd do. What would you do? I'd go catatonic. I've handled some crisis calls in libraries, but not life or death types of things.

Dodie King

I thought about that crisis thing when I was thinking about what I was going to say today. That's why I said that I think everyone who answers the phone in a library should be able to have at least some starting point for questions like that, because you just cannot transfer that kind of call, especially if it's an imminent thing like that. I don't know what I would have done before, but what I would do now is slip into my training, try to make contact with the person and see if I could get in touch with that person; but that's because I've had training in that. Before that I would probably have panicked. I don't know what I would have done.

Ms. O'Donnell

I think--you know, it might not be a suicide question. But libraries do get crisis calls like, you know, "My child has taken poison," and that kind of thing; and it is a terrifying feeling. You kind of don't know what to do. I think what you said--you know, this is really necessary for us to have some kind of preparedness so we can handle it as well as possible.

Comment

I have this suicide crisis number right on my phone on the handle. It hasn't happened, but just in case, I can ask for help.

Question

Well, I was wondering; on your set of questions, in some of the questions you were either non-committal or played on more liberal sympathies of the person answering the phone. Did you consider the possibility that you may have gotten a different response if your questions had been, say, "Where is the National Rifle Association meeting in my neighborhood?"

Ms. Minudri

Possibly, yes. One of the things we really wanted to do was to check on the more liberal kind of question that we felt might...

Question

But you have a lot of young librarians working at the desk, you assume, and you think that they might steer your results with those types of questions. I mean, I might--you know, I have my prejudices.

Ms. Minudri

Yes, we all do. That's why it's important to be non-judgmental.

Gordon McShean

I just wanted to put in a little bit about that suicide question, about the suicide being imminent. In your training in suicide prevention, the first thing you are told is that if a person calls and tells you they're going to shoot themself, they actually hesitated before shooting themself. They made the call. Therefore, they are asking for help, and so you can expect at least a couple of seconds in which you may intervene before putting your fingers to your ears.

Ms. Minudri

As I said, this is only a preliminary report, and it's going to take some time to get this into shape, because there's a tremendous amount of information; but we felt that it tied in so beautifully with today's subject that we thought you would be interested in it.

Question

What about the availability of the printed report?

Ms. Minudri

Well, SRRT reports are usually available from SRRT, and I'm sure it will be announced when it's ready.

Ms. O'Donnell-We'll put it in BARC Notes or in Synergy. Are there any other questions? If not, thank you very much.

SWITCHBOARDS LISTEN

John Calkins and Liz Schonberg

Mr. Calkins

Good morning. We kind of prepared this on our way up here. If it doesn't come off, well, start asking questions. I'm John Calkins from Whole Earth Switchboard in San Carlos. We're a 24-hour switchboard, and we're funded by the cities of San Carlos and Belmont Recreation Departments, which give money to the Belmont YMCA. We're supervised by the Belmont YMCA, which is part of the metropolitan YMCA. We have 40 volunteers presently working actively on the switchboard.

Ms. Schonberg

I'm Liz. I'm co-director of the switchboard Dodie works on, which is Project Outreach Switchboard in Redwood City. We're funded differently. We're funded through the county itself. We have 50 to 60 volunteers that work, most of them actively, and most of our group is relatively young, because we do a lot of work with students at high schools and local colleges. We do a lot of listening skills. Right now we're having a new training session, training new volunteers in how to become active listeners. I'm really excited about it. We had our first night of training last night.

Basically, what we'd like to do today is share with you how we have learned, and how we'd like to have you pick up some skills on how to actively listen. Certainly the value of information is unquestionable, and that's what the whole session seems to be about. We do a lot more than information. We do a lot of getting in touch with what that person is trying to say, and that's a skill that's maybe not so easy to pick up, and maybe for some it comes very naturally. Our job is to train volunteers how to listen. What we want to share is our concept of listening and how you can apply that in maybe a library situation or in a personal situation. We'd just like to say that this is really informal rap, and any time questions come up, just ask them. We're not going to lecture.

Mr. Calkins

One of the things that we talked about on the way up was that we probably have about 7 hours of material. Liz just started a training session, and I had a 2 1/2 hour meeting last night on developing and improving our training. So we thought maybe what we would do would be give you our concept of what listening is, and things that are important to listening. That's our only real rap, and from that point on, whatever questions you have in regards to how we go about doing it, why we do it, etc., we encourage them, because that's about all we're going to do.

One of the things we came up with this morning was the fact that listening is not something that's a technique. It's not something that you just come into the switchboard and sit down, and you put on your listening techniques, and you pick up the phone. It's something that becomes part of you. It becomes part of your life style. It becomes part of what you do as a person. You learn to listen, and it becomes part of you. There's no tricks or gimmicks to it. It's something you really have to be doing all the time to be effective.

Ms. Schonberg

I think a lot of it just has to do with the quality of the person involved. One of the things we really look for when we start training is the fact that if you're a sensitive person and aware of the fact that somebody's having a problem, it's important that you're in touch with them and with yourself. One of the first things we talk about--we wrote a slide presentation, and one of the central issues is that the volunteers have to get in touch with what they are in order for them to be able to listen to what someone else is. It's very important in our training that you go through your own growth process, with the various aspects of sexuality, drugs, and being aware of how you feel in order to be able to empathize with how someone else might feel. The growth process involves first becoming aware of, "This is how I feel about sexuality." Well, let's work with that; let's role play it; let's talk it out; let's get it more in touch with how I can help someone else.

Our basic training is centered around what's called empathic listening skills. There are lots of other names for it, and our director knows them. Basically what it means to me is getting in touch with your own sensitivity, and getting in touch with how you feel, so that you can say, "Well, one time I was depressed, and that's how I felt, so maybe that is what she feels like; maybe I can give that to her and see if we can share that common feeling." In empathy, what we do, for example, if I were sitting with you, and I said, "You know, I'm really depressed," and you said, "Wow, I was depressed a little while ago, and this is kind of what I felt like; is this what you're feeling?" Then she gets in touch with the fact that not only have you lived through that and done something with it, but that you're much more understanding of where she is. It's not a matter of saying, "This is what I did, so you'd better do it." It's a matter of saying, "That's a common feeling." There's basic feelings in our human emotions, that of depression, anger, love, a lot of feelings that we've all felt at one time or another. Our basic training is getting in touch with those feelings and being able to share them.

A lot of times your personality can be distracted if you're not aware of it, if you're not aware of some emotion. For example, we come into a shift, and one of the first things we say to somebody is, "Spend a few minutes getting in touch with your mood." I do a lot of rushing, and I come in all in a rush, and they say, "Slow down, Liz. People calling in might have something that they might want you to take time with." It's important that you are in touch with not only yourself as a person, but your immediate situation too. So don't let personality or mood characteristics get in the way of being able to listen actively to someone else.

Mr. Calkins

One of the typical examples of that, when you talk about getting in touch with yourself, is an example of somebody who got up on the wrong side of the bed, which I'm sure you've all experienced with your bosses, or whatever--basically a person who is carrying some kind of feeling with him all day that affects everything he does. In other words, if he's in a bad mood, he's not going to hear well. He's going to be uptight because he got up on the wrong side of the bed. That's what we do at the switchboard. We try to get people to be aware that if they're uptight about something, not to put that on somebody else. That's their feeling, and they've got to keep it untangled from other people's. If you've ever experienced the wrong side of the bed person, you know what I'm talking about; and if you've got a problem, and you're talking to a person who got up on the wrong side of the bed, you know you aren't going to get any help. Switchboards emphasize trying to get people to be in touch with themselves so they don't put that on other people. If it's a bad day at the resource desk, and somebody calls up, you're going to have a hard time hearing them if you aren't aware it's a bad day at the resource desk.

One other thing Liz mentioned that I'd just like to amplify a little bit is the time thing. We emphasize that a lot. Half of listening is having patience--in other words, not looking for a quick answer. We all have quick answers to problems. Let's say Liz has no problem when it comes to school. So somebody calls up and says, "Gee, I've got school problems," and Liz just comes up with her quick answer, "Well, all you've got to do is study harder." So you're not really hearing that person. You've got to take the time when you hear, "I have school problems;" if you don't understand that, you've got to reflect it back and continually listen to hear what's really bothering that person. That takes time.

One of the examples we were talking about is, if somebody calls up a switchboard and says, "Where can I go to get information about pregnancy?", OK, that's a very simple question, and I can say right off the top of my head, "In San Mateo County you call 348-2424, which is Planned Parenthood, and they'll take care of you." OK, if that person is in a place that they know what they want and they know what their problem is, they might call that number. If they don't, and you haven't taken time to listen to the fact that they're afraid, that they're not sure they're pregnant, that they're not even sure what pregnancy is, that they aren't even sure what sexuality is, if you haven't taken the time to listen to that, then that number you just gave them is worthless. So time is really vital, the amount of time you take.

Ms. Schonberg

One of the things that John just mentioned that I hadn't thought about is, the service that we provide and the service that you hope to provide is some sort of intervention center. We started as a crisis intervention center. We don't deal with as much crisis as maybe other switchboards. We have a small 10%, as most switchboards do; but one of the things we do is a lot of intervention, finding out. You know how frustrating it is to call a bureaucracy and say, "Well, I want this amount of help," and have to go through all the different channels to the right department. It's worse when you're not really sure exactly what you want, but you're in this situation and think maybe you should call somebody. To many people who call us, it is tremendously threatening to have to call more than once to find information, and that's why they call us.

In the situation of a pregnancy, one of the things John said on the way up, depending on the tone of the voice--"I'm pregnant, and I really need some help; who should I call?" That's a lot different from, "I'd like some information about pregnancy; who can I call?" It's really getting in touch with the fact that that's a really scared little girl there, and that maybe you should talk with her a few minutes before you just give her a phone number, because she's obviously really threatened to call in the first place. That's the kind of intervention that we hope to be able to do, being able not just to plug somebody into the right place, but being able to talk to them first to find out if that's maybe exactly what they want. A lot of our time is spent just finding out if people are where they really think they are and if that's really what they want. Then, by all means, let's go with it. Not only is a phone number irrelevant if the person is scared, but it also might not be the right place, and it also might be something that they can't handle. It might be on a level that might be totally different from where they are.

So what we try to do--we're trained in really getting in touch with where the person is and plugging him into the right place. Switchboards aren't psychiatrists. When we go out to find volunteers we really make it known that anybody, if they're warm and concerned, can be a switchboard volunteer, merely because it's a matter of training in how to listen and getting in touch, and that is something that almost anyone can do. Obviously people here are concerned or they wouldn't be here. So we have no hierarchy of skills that we use. It's something very basic that we teach, and it's just a matter of really getting in touch with those that are calling in.

One of the things that comes up a lot that I had the most trouble with in training--I was a volunteer a year ago, and am now co-director; but I started out as a high school student, just as most people do in our switchboard. One of the hard times I had was that I was so concerned and so loving that I overdid it a lot. I really went out of my way to get this person involved. When a suicide called, and hung up on me, I was just shattered. I didn't know what to do.

Probably you will be in stress situations a lot of times like we are, but in social work, at switchboards, in most work where you're dealing directly with people, there's always the thin line that you stand on whether you get personally invovled or not; and that is something that probably each one of you will have to work out through time. I'm just saying be aware of the fact that a lot of personal involvement sometimes can be way over. A lot of people really don't want to know what you're doing personally. They just want help right here, and that's all they want right now. So watching personal involvement means watching, "Well, this is what I did, so maybe you can try it," which is a form of advice that we try to stay away from, because that person is the only one who knows what he most needs--which is saying a lot in a short sentence--but also keeping in touch with the idea that my person is different from this person, and I can help him as much as I can help, but a close relationship over the phone is not going to be maybe what's best for that person, or especially for me.

One of the things that's really hard is that we have a lot of people coming into the switchboard, and they're just really wide open, a lot of young people that really want to save the world; and this is the best way that they have of doing it. It's kind of a neat thing to watch them grow to the point where they can say, "I'm valuable to me, and I'm going to keep this much separate from what I'm doing, but I'm also really helping somebody." So it's important to keep some sort of separateness, and that's keeping in touch with how you feel about getting involved. In other words, if you get a call, and at the same time that you're aware of what you are as a person and in that mood, you're aware of what you're doing at the phone at the same time, so you take a couple of seconds to say, "OK, I'm really tense now, and this situation is really tense, so that these are the kinds of things that maybe I can do to loosen up the tenseness or to help this person." So be aware how personally involved you're getting.

Mr. Calkins

I'd like to amplify on that just a little bit. What she's talking about is called responsibility. One of the things in helping people is there's a lot of motives. I'm sure you've had people help you, and you feel that they're going to put the bite on your wallet, or they're going to ask you for a favor, etc. That kind of help is where you are being responsible for that person, because you want something back from them. You want them to be responsible for you. That's the kind of thing we try not to do. We try to help people be responsible for themselves. We emphasize over and over again that I am not responsible for somebody killing himself. If he kills himself, that is his own choice, and I have to allow him to make his own choice. I am not responsible, but I will do for him what I can, and I will be concerned for him, but I will not be responsible for what he does.

One of the most important things in helping people is keeping responsibility in its place, giving that person a picture that he can be responsible for himself, and that there are things he can do for himself, and that you can't do anything for him except listen. That responsibility thing is probably one that we all get hung up on every once in awhile. It hurts us when somebody doesn't do what you think he should. It's the old feeling that you feel like you did a good job, and then he calls back 2 days later, and he fell apart, and it hurts you, and you go, "Wow, I really blew it." It's not you who's blowing it; it's him not taking responsibility for himself. You have to remember that. It's a fine line. It doesn't say you don't care. It just says you can't be responsible for what he does.

Ms. Schonberg

In our training we do a lot of growing things to get in touch with ourselves. One of the things we do that really shows the point that John just made is, in our training we have lectures, and then we divide up into small groups and work strictly in small groups. This is where the tools of active listening become effective. One of the first things I do in my small group is, I'll lie on the floor and say, "Help me; help me," just helpless. I'm like a Raggedy Ann Doll while I'm saying, "Help me; help me." All the people are saying, "This is really weird; what am I doing here," and they're all sitting around going "Blah." Finally one or two of them, or one who is really an extrovert will come over and try to pick me up. It's really interesting to see the different kinds of things that happen. Most people come and try to pick me up, and they're really frustrated when I don't do a thing. They have to do all the work. The first time I role played it, I just finally got so angry, and I just pushed her up and said, "But you're not doing a thing for yourself." She said, "That's the point. We can't help anybody unless she wants to help herself."

Obviously, people reaching out when they call us--but at the same time we have callers that call in, like John said, 2 days later and say the same thing, "I'm pregnant; what should I do?" I say, "Wow, how far can I go?" You know, I really gave to that person, and she's either at a place where she can't handle what I gave her, or I don't agree with her so that maybe I can do something else or try someone else that might get through to her; but you really can't be dragged down by the fact that a person is not going to help herself, because there's nothing that you can do about it. There has to be that initiated first.

Mr. Calkins

That's one of the exercises we do too. It's really a great exercise. One of the things that's good about it too is that once you get that person stood up, you realize she won't be standing up if you let go of her; so you've got to realize that you've got 40 callers calling you, and they're depending on you to stand up, and you can get pretty drained. I came up the same way she did. I was a volunteer, and I learned through the volunteer stage that once you get just a couple going, you start feeling really down, because they're really down, and you're holding them up. It drains the energy out of you. It's a really good exercise to do just to make a point.

Ms. Schonberg

Probably you wouldn't have the same kind of situation as we do where people continue to call. We really encourage people not to continue to call the same person, but we encourage people to get help not just from one person, but from a variety of sources.

Mr. Calkins

One of the things I was going to add to that is that when you get to a person--that's when it gets complex--when you get to a person, and he continually comes back to you with the same problem, that's when listening is really tested. We've had it tested. You have to be able to listen to what is getting in the way of them listening to you, which gets to be really complex. People have a lot of reasons why they can't do something.

Question

Excuse me for interrupting. When you said you encourage them not to call back, did you mean the same person at the switchboard or the switchboard itself?

Ms. Schonberg

Well, it depends on the situation. If the person calls in with a problem that's apparently very significant to him, what we do normally is listen to him, try and figure out his problem, and try to refer him to someone who is better able to handle his situation. Just to grab a situation out of the hat that has existed at our switchboard: A person calls in who has a chronic illness which comes from an emotional state and says, "My stomach is always upset, because I'm an alcoholic; and I'm an alcoholic because my husband left me; what should I do?" We've rapped that out 2 or 3 times with her, and she keeps calling back and talking just to me. She keeps saying, "Is Liz there? I need to talk to her. I'm in a crisis situation, and I have to talk to her." And I am continuously saying, "Here's somebody in the county who really wants to help you." So it's both.

If a person is very lonely and trying to get somewhere... We have something called regular callers, and most of our regular callers will call for a series of times, like a month, and then stop for awhile. A lot of our calls have to do with loneliness and depression. A young or old person who's very lonely, it takes them awhile to get up the courage to go out and actually meet somebody, or to go out and do something. So that's a situation where, if we see it, we say, "Oh, he's just calling back so that he can feel more reassured and get further along, and he's making progress." When we see that he's not going to be needing us, as just holding him up there, and when we walk away he's not going to be standing any more, then we realize that situation is one where we're actually helping that person by having him call in when he feels like it. But if he's not taking any advice, or whatever we're trying to help him with, then he's not helping himself. Our main emphasis is doing the most for them that we can do, and if we feel that they haven't learned a thing by calling us, then we try to do something else.

Mr. Calkins

Most people that call are not really sure a lot of times about what they need, or about what they don't understand. Like they'll just say, "I'm lonely," which could mean 25 different things. Sometimes it takes a long time to identify what is making them lonely, something that is holding them back from reaching out to people. In that case, you can't make a referral right away. Somebody might also call up with any kind of a problem, and it's hard to make a referral right away, partly because of the agencies. I'll get into that a little bit.

When we went through our 2 1/2 hours of training development last night, one of the things that we became aware of that we've been lacking on in understanding agencies. That may not seem as important as understanding the caller, but that's something that I think is really important. When you make a referral to an agency, a typical example is, you know, the guy who goes to 9 different places. If you get a caller who's very unsure, if you make one bad referral, that may be the worse thing you could have done. One bad referral, one turn-down, one failure is all they need. So it's important to understand both the problem and the referral that you're making, to make sure that that connection is a valid one.

An example would be somebody that has some kind of a religious bias. Some agencies have a religious bias. Let's say somebody called up; his father was a minister, and he came down on the caller all the time, a rigid kind of minister; and you send him to a Christian center which does counselling. That may be it. That may be the last time he'll call you back, because it's been a failure of yours.

Question

Do you call an agency in advance to see if the problem that you think could be referred to them should, in fact, be referred to them before you have that person call?

Mr. Calkins

That's one of the things we got into last night. That's something we haven't emphasized enough. I personally do it, and some people on the switchboard do it. If we aren't sure about the agency, we check it out. In the case of anything that's off the wall that we're not sure about, any agency that we look in the book, and it says nice things, but we've never heard of them before, then we'll call. One of the things I usually discover is, that is one of the greatest ways of eliminating the many referrals that we have. You start calling them, and after awhile you find they either don't exist, or what was written in that book isn't what they do. So you find that you can cut a lot of them down without having the caller, who is very unsure to start with, make those mistakes himself.

Question

Are most people willing to give you their phone numbers and let you call them back? Calling an agency, you would have to call the person back. Are most people willing to do that, or do they prefer to remain anonymous?

Ms. Schonberg

I think there are 2 situations that you just brought up. One of them is specifically if we know an agency, we always check them out before we refer them anyway. Most switchboards do that. One of the things we always do is make sure what the agency is, and we usually have cards. Ours are something like this. They sit there in a box, but we have our own notes at the bottom about our experiences with the agency. Then on almost every call, we try to ask them to call back, even if it didn't work. If it did work, call us back and tell us how it went. Unfortunately, because we have so many volunteers on different shifts, it never gets back to the same person; but the information goes on the cards, and if somebody really had a bum experience, and it's valid, we'll either follow up on it or write it on the card and say, "Be careful of such and such a person," or whatever.

The other situation that you brought up is the specific situation where the caller is waiting, like on hold, or has given you his phone number, and wants you to call him back as soon as you get the information. If it's not a crisis, and it's not a situation that has to be dealt with immediately--a lot of the calls we get are; "I need a ride; I'm in a phone booth; call me back quickly." Or, "I need a place to live; I'm on the streets; I don't have a phone number." That's a situation where you have to do it really fast. Most people will leave their phone number. Most of the referrals we do are just across-the-board referrals, but we're beginning to pick up a much better way of doing referrals.

Mr. Calkins

The feedback thing is really important. I'm glad you brought that up. That's one thing we've lacked on. I think switchboards in general don't take an advocacy role in following up on a referral and making some comments, and also listening to that agency when you call them. It's amazing that if you call up an agency and say, "What do you do?", they'll tell you one thing; and if you call up with a problem, they'll tell you another. I think I learned that there's 2 ways to approach an agency. I found the best way to approach an agency is with a problem, not with a question about what they do. That's another thing I like about Georgia Mulligan's book. She kind of approaches the thing on a problem level: "Here's the problem; now, where can I get the problem solved?", instead of saying, "What do you do as an agency?" "Oh, we help people, and we counsel people." What does counsel mean? You've got to listen to them, and it's more difficult than listening to the caller.

Question

Do you ever give information about your contact to the administration of that agency?

Mr. Calkins

I'll just say that's very delicate; yes and no, and she's going to answer it.

Ms. Schonberg

I just want to say that one of the things we do at the switchboard, especially I do, and most of the directors do, is use the referrals that we give. A pregnancy situation--for example, me personally; I had to have a pregnancy test done recently, and so rather than go to my doctor, I decided to go through Public Health Nursing, because I had referred so many girls there that I wanted to find out what it was like. It wasn't sneaky. I didn't go there with an unreal problem. I went there with my problem. I went through, and it was beautiful. I just was so pleased. She let me rap about whatever I wanted to. She didn't give me any kinds of moral questions, and I was just there for hours talking to her. I felt fine, so I told her, "It's really neat to have someone here who's friendly, because we try to be friendly on the phone, and try to be so warm; we never know what happens to the person after we hang up the phone." I went to her specifically, and I said, "Gee, I'm really glad that you're here and that you're really open." And I went to her peer and told her, "You seem to have a really warm staff. Even though you don't have any chairs yet because you just moved, it's really a warm office." I made sure to do that.

When we get calls back that say, "I really had a bad time here," we don't automatically just take that and write it down. We try to go through it more. Rather than just one person saying they had a bad experience, which anybody could have with any agency, and say, "Gee, she had a problem; could she come back and talk to someone else?", normally we deal directly with the people that she dealt with, not with the administration. If it gets to the point where it's really good comments or really critical comments, then we do go to the administration. It's not very often.

Mr. Calkins

It's very rare, and that's very delicate. In a switchboard's position, we don't have a lot of clout, and when you don't have a lot of clout, it's difficult to approach an agency on an administration level and say, "You guys are really doing a terrible job." That makes you a little more obscure and maybe will eliminate you eventually. So you've got to be really careful. Like she said, and I would emphasize that we deal directly with the person that that person might have dealt with, and we start there. At our switchboard, if we find out that a whole agency is made up of people that do a very poor job, then we will notate it, and nobody will make any referrals to it. That's the best way we can deal with it.

Comment

It won't get any better then.

Mr. Calkins

Yes and no. One of the things that starts happening there is that you don't get people ripped off, and another thing that happens is that they don't get people coming in, and the word starts getting around. Again, it's an awareness level. You know, when you start attacking somebody about his agency... I'm sure if anybody came and attacked your system, it would make it very difficult for you to sit there and go, "Yeah, alright; we'll change it all around for you." You know, you really feel OK about what you're doing. They have to be open to wanting to change it. Most of the time when an agency is really bad, you'll find that they aren't really open to changing it either.

Comment

When I used to be in this business I would have names of the agency people who I had had lunch with, or who I had talked with on my off hours, and found out they were probably really good workers. Then when I would give out my numbers, I would also give out my names.

Mr. Calkins

That's important. People-to-people contact is probably the best way, definitely, to make a referral to a person that you feel good about, because the person that's hearing that feels you feeling good about that referral. That's really important.

Comment

If a caller gets a switchboard at an agency, the switchboard operator there can be really threatening. If you have somebody's name to give that switchboard operator, it makes things go just so much smoother.

Ms. Schonberg

Our cards are set up so that we have the name of the agency, when they're open, and a specific blank saying, "Person to contact." So many young people that we work with are so afraid to call us to begin with. I find another point is, one of the things that we've really begun doing on the switchboard, because I'm doing it, is a lot more community involvement. I work directly with some things like the Neighborhood Council in Redwood City, and I know a lot of people in the county; and I'll say things like, "Gee, I talked to Karen yesterday, and she's not busy tomorrow; it would be really nice if you could go and talk to her. She's a friend of mine, and if you have any problems..." Somehow that says, if you don't like it, you can talk to me again. At the same time, it gives the person someone to contact directly.

Mr. Calkins

If the caller feels good about you, and you feel good about somebody else, that's one of the best connections that you can make.

Question

Could you talk about your relationships with the libraries in your communities, if there is any?

Mr. Calkins

I can probably talk about that for a couple of hours. Very seriously, this is new to me too. The switchboards on the Peninsula got together and put together the Federation. We started meeting, and we're trying to improve our services and trying to start some communication. Marcia Keller [San Mateo County Library] came to one of our meetings, and she showed us her cards and started really sharing a lot of information. I kind of went, "Librarian?" Like, it didn't jibe with my image, and when she sat down, we didn't jibe with her image either. What started there was a good working relationship with Marcia. Then I'm involved with another group. There are a couple of people here from that group. It's the Information Consortium, which is very hard to explain, but Georgia Mulligan's been active in that. What I've discovered is that I used to think of libraries as places where you got books, and that's all, and that there was nothing else there. That's all that I was aware of. Our switchboard is 2 blocks from the Belmont Library, and I had never gone in there looking for anything until I saw Marcia Keller's card file. I started talking to Marcia and realized the amount of information that's available on bulletin boards, etc. I'm really totally impressed with the library.

Question

Do the libraries refer anyone to you?

Mr. Calkins

I think more and more. One of the things I would say that the only way people can make referrals is, if we feel good about each other. If the library feels really good about us and understands us, and we feel really good about the library and understand the people there, then that's when the referrals start happening. I think that the involvement, the mixing with the people and getting to know them and understanding what they do, causes referrals. I don't know if they refer people to us. I've heard people mention that they do. Somehow Peggy got referred to me.

Again, it takes a long time when you've been isolating yourselves like switchboards have isolated themselves, and libraries have isolated themselves. All agencies have gotten into their own little thing and said, "We're doing our job; we don't need you." I think more and more, especially the library, we'll see a lot more involvement. They're very invaluable as far as resource gathering.

Ms. Schonberg

To add just a note to that, and that is, I had the same image of the library, and I thought the library was a place to read. There's always the "Shh," you know, and there's this image that you grow up with. One of the things that I've been really fascinated with is getting in touch with a number of people in the community who are doing the same thing we are. All of us are saying, like you said, "I'm here on duty." The police were mentioned. The switchboard began as an underground type of situation, and the police were really separate from what we were trying to do. Yet, in tracing calls, and beginning to try to work with the police force just in Redwood City, and being aware of the fact that they handle just as many of the same things we do, we wanted to try to work together.

So a direct relationship with the library--well, I don't always say, "Call the library." I say, "Dodie King works at the library; call her, and she'll be able to..." A specific example was, at Christmastime we decided to go Christmas caroling at some of the old folks' homes in Redwood City. I was there at the phone book, and I opened it up, and there were 500 old folks' homes in Redwood City. So I said, "Listen, where can we get hold of some information on low-income old folks' homes where people wouldn't have any family?" Dodie said, "Hey, the library has stuff like that." So we're beginning to work together, but it's slow. It is mixing people rather than saying, "Call the library," or "Call this agency." It's "Call So and So who is my friend."

Gordon McShean

I have the background in both. I had one lesson, for instance, that was from a library administrator. In the instance of a formal approach from a switchboard for cooperation, the library stated, "I see no logic whatever in cooperation between us." I've been fighting this all along, and when you listen to me this afternoon, you'll hear a little of my pessimism. I wanted to ask you, Liz particularly, when you said awhile ago that only about 10% or less of your calls were crisis calls. Yet, what we've been hearing this last day or so has mostly been about crisis. I can understand that, having worked on a switchboard, because that seems to be what's important to you when you're on the job; but libraries tend to say, "Oh, all that crisis stuff; we can't do anything with that; that's not our area." I'm asking you to reinforce what I say. If I am on a shift for 4 hours and answer 40 calls, and only 3 of them are crisis calls, I've still answered 37 other information calls. Isn't that right, and wouldn't that be good for libraries to do?

Ms. Schonberg

Yeah; crisis is a word that is really hard. When we do our training, we do one night on crisis, one night on sexuality, one night on drugs, and the whole bit. Crisis is the first thing you think of when you think of switchboards, because things like the movie Hotline just shows things like, you know, "Suicide! Here I am; I can't blow it!" Most young volunteers, even though they have just as much equal training in all of the other areas, are scared most about a crisis. When I first got on the phone I said, "Ooh, what if my first call is a crisis call!" I think that emphasis has been on crisis, and yet, crisis to us is a situation that involves immediate intervention--a drug OD, a suicide. There again, suicides can be--you know, I'm thinking about it maybe tomorrow," or, "I've got a gun in my hand and I'm going to shoot myself." Crisis, in terms of our definition, is something that involves immediate information, or immediate referrals to hospitals or whatever. The 37 other calls--one of the things that I was trying to say is that, although libraries are mostly involved in information, there's so many things behind a request for information that I think we should be in touch with. I think about 70% of our calls are loneliness and depression, or just wanting to talk. Maybe those aren't the specific areas the libraries will be in, but in the situation of pregnancy, that's certainly not a crisis situation. It's a situation that really needs some attention in terms of, she really needs some help, and sure, she's asking for a referral, and you can just give her a referral and send her on her merry way, except she probably won't be very merry, because she really wanted to talk about it. Most of the calling that the libraries would be working with is, not necessarily pursuing a request for information if it's just a request, but being in touch with, if you were her, how upset would you be.

One of the things I did the first couple of weeks I was on, somebody would call up and say, "I want some VD information," and "Oh, wow, let's really be unhappy," and really try to get into it, you know; and they'd say, "But I just want some VD information." Then I'd say, "Oh, you sure you don't want to talk about it?" I always overdid it, and most people underdid it, but it's really important that you pursue it if the callers want to. If she's really scared, it's important that you talk to her about it. That's where I think it's really important that libraries and switchboards work together, because we can certainly share with you, in terms of the actual tools to get in touch with how a person is feeling.

One of the tools that we use is the role play situation, which you did yesterday, and you're going to be doing again this afternoon; and basically what we use that for is... We do 2 types of role plays. One of them is called empathy skills, and the other is just called role plays. We start out with empathy. Empathy is basically, I'm talking to Peggy, and Peggy is Peggy, and I'm Liz, and I don't know very much about her, but I just want to share this very small problem with her, and that's just basically as friends. Whereas, role play is back-to-back, and I pick up the phone, and I don't know anything about you, but I want to help you. There's a real difference. In empathy we share real problems, and that's a real sharing thing. Our training is based on the fact that this guy was a drug addict at one time, and I was pregnant at one time, and maybe we can share a few things and learn how to deal with that. That's what our empathy is. In role playing it's having a situation like, in crisis night it's about crisis; in sexuality it's about sexuality. It's calling up and saying, "I have this problem." So that's a specific tool that you can use in terms of getting in touch with a problem and handling it.

My only point is very much in support of what your comment was, that we can share those kinds of things with libraries, but certainly libraries have a huge realm of information and personalities that you can share with us. So I would say that the fact that they're not compatible is absurd.

Question

I know that you must get this kind of thing. I did health counselling in Oakland, and there's more than one counsellor. We'd get people who had problems, and they'd pretty well know what the problem was, but they really didn't want to tell us. They'd say, "Yes, but," and they'd go from one person to another. What do you do with this person? You know they need help, but they really don't want it yet, and you hate to cut them off, but how much time can you devote to that?

Mr. Calkins

That's a very interesting kind of a person. The best skill that I picked up on is one that Outreach does. When somebody says, "Yes, but...", it's kind of like, "Yeah, I hear what you're saying I could do," and then they're negating the whole thing. They're saying, "But I have all these reasons why I can't do it." One of the greatest tools in the world, and it may seem like a silly one, is to replace "but" with "and." Just taking "but" out, which negates everything, and putting "and" in there, you can start saying, "It seems you really have a conflict. You're saying 'yes,' and then you're saying 'no.'" They're saying "yes" and "no," so you can start working on that "no." Again, those kind of people are the chronic callers, but if you can tune them into the fact that they are negating everything that they're saying "yes" to, sometimes that's enough to get them looking at their behavior a little bit.

Question

You said 2 things that I want to relate together. One is that you get about 70% calls from people who are basically lonely, and you're saying if you become too involved you get too dragged down. In other words, one person can't do it. One person cannot solve the loneliness of another person. It takes many people to support that sort of thing. Do you do anything about trying to get people involved with groups?

Mr. Calkins

That's a good question. That's one thing we were developing in our training last night. That's one thing we see as a real need that's difficult to do. I'll respond to your question by saying that we can't be the answer to that person's loneliness. Sometimes we will be for awhile until they understand that we are interested in them, but then we have to re-emphasize to them that loneliness is their responsibility to eliminate. It is like boredom. When somebody says they are bored, usually you'll say something like, "Well, do something, and then you won't be bored." OK, when somebody's lonely, they need people. A switchboard doesn't try to be those people, unless that person is willing to put out. One of the very peculiar things about some of our ex-callers, sometimes a caller will just call up and be lonely because he really wants some real involvement with people, and there isn't much. In that case, if he's really willing to put out, we've got a vehicle that says, "Yeah, we're here, and we're open, and we're growing, and we'd like you to be a part of us; we can use your help." In that case, he'll come in, but if he's in a place where he says, "I'm lonely, but I can't do anything about it," then there's nothing that can be done about it, until he says, "I'm willing to do something."

Ms. Schonberg

I'd like to expand on that. Certain groups are better for a lonely person to be in, if he wants that. We really try not to give advice since he knows what's best for himself. If he decides that he really wants to become involved, we try to tap on, "Well, who's closest to you? Who do you want? Do you want to get out of the situation you're in and go to a group on Thursday nights? If so, we have this group. Do you want to see somebody personally to help you for awhile to get your confidence up, and then get into maybe a day group?" Our community has both groups and individual counselling. The caller will say, "Gee, that sounds like maybe what I'm looking for." We'll say, "Go look up So and So."

One of the things that we really try to do is help people in the situation they're immediately in. Many people just can't take our referral and go. Many people have to live there day to day, and it's really helpful if they can get into something that's immediate. Basically what I'm trying to say is, there's the old advice, "Call your minister; call your doctor; talk to your mother." Sometimes the young person couldn't do that. It is really important that the person gets the confidence to deal with the groups that are right around him. I'm from New England, and I came out to California about 3 years ago. I see groups springing up which are really rewarding. The person goes and opens up to the group on Thursday night, and he goes home and doesn't talk to his father about it. To me, it's really important that he also talk at home. If he wants to do this, I'm not going to say, "You have to talk to your father." I'm just going to say, "Gee, you're really not in touch with the people around you, because that's something you really want to do; it sounds like you're lonely. Do you just want to go to a group on Thursday nights, or do you want maybe someone to turn to immediately?

A situation where a little girl is really scared to walk down the street, because she's living in a black neighborhood, and she says, "I'm really self-conscious; I don't want to do that." A referral for her to go to a group might build up her confidence, but she still has to live in that neighborhood. So a suggestion like, "Is there a lady on the street that you like that you can talk to that might look out her window when you come home from school?" Or, "Can you ask your dad to maybe come home from work an hour early every once in awhile?"--something that's very immediate. So in terms of groups, it's important that they see the difference between the groups that they can get out and go to and then find their heads and go do something else, or groups that they might need to have somebody right there close. So the loneliness can be almost anything--you know, "I'm lonely and I need one friend," or, "I'm lonely, and I need a lot of friends."

Question

Do you feel that your operation would be less efficient or would have to change substantially in terms of its framework if you went from a phone format to a face-to-face format? Most librarians are in public buildings, and there is a lot of face-to-face contact.

Mr. Calkins

We do have a few people on the switchboard that do in-person counselling, and some of the people who do our training are professional, and they'll do face-to-face counselling too; but there's little or no difference in the skills you need. There's a little more awareness that you have to have facing people that you don't need over the phone, and you need to intensify your skills on the phone to be effective. The facts about listening are just amplified and changed a little bit.

One of the things that I think are coming out in a lot of articles and a lot of new therapy techniques is that one of the most important things in counselling of any sort is being able to listen, being able to really hear that person. Most people who have problems do not feel that anybody understands them, so therefore, they don't want to understand themselves, because if nobody understands you, then there must be something wrong with you. If people can just have people understand what the problem is and hear it, sometimes that is enough for them to go about doing something about it, face-to-face or over the phone, either way. If you just hear that problem and just kind of accept it, you say, "I hear you're feeling depressed," or, "I hear you're really feeling upset about your father doing this to you"--anything like that is just enough reassurance sometimes for somebody to say, "Wow, somebody understands me." You can do that face-to-face the same way.

Ms. Schonberg

I'd like to disagree with that just a little. I think it's really different to talk to somebody face-to-face than on the phone. I've done both, not professionally, but as a person working with people. Our co-director is also a professional psychiatrist and works both in counselling on the phone and also face-to-face. We have a different policy at Whole Earth in that we're very confidential. Nobody knows where we are, supposedly, and we don't have drop-in situations, because we're not set up to handle it. We have a 3-room office, and we're supported by the county. We can't have people staying overnight, because we're not set up that way. We hope to move into a house and have more face-to-face contact.

One of the things we talk about is the need for a phone service. One of the important things we find is many people who call cannot handle turning to a friend or turning to someone face-to-face, but an impersonal item like a phone is very important to them. They can smile, or cry, or do anything, and nobody's going to think they're funny, because they are just talking to a machine. So I really think it's different in people's approach to the counselling itself.

I also think it's different for the counsellor, for the listener, in that when you're talking face-to-face, you pick up a hundred things non-verbally. One of the reasons we do both empathy and role play is to show the difference between me talking to Peggy smiling, and Peggy going on with that, because I like what I'm hearing and understand it, or me talking to someone on the phone and not being able to know anything about what she's doing. Most of our volunteers have a really hard time when we move into back-to-back, because most of our volunteers are very verbal, open, friendly people; but they're used to having people look at them, and it's hard for them not to have those cues. So I think the counselling itself is different, basically because you listen, and that's the one thing that's hardest for most, and yet it's the basic thing we train, the ability to be warm and sensitive enough to listen to someone else. So a phone service and face-to-face are very different. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. When we move into a house situation, hopefully if we do, we'll be able to compare. It's interesting to talk to people who were callers, who are now volunteers. It's really a different kind of an experience.

Question

What kind of a screening process do you have for your volunteers?

Mr. Calkins

I'll try and answer it in a very brief way. I've got 3 things. The first thing we do is look at what we're looking for. In other words, we have to know what we do, and what kind of person is going to fit into what we do. What we came up with last night is, we can take anybody who is looking for something to do. Now, something to do sounds like some people might want to have some people to smoke pot with, or some people might want to get into breaking down buildings with some people, but they're looking for something to do. We're looking for people who are looking for something relevant to their life to do. In other words, the kind of people who come in and say, "Gee, I work 5 days a week, and I don't feel that good about it, and I'd like to do something where I really feel it's valuable; I'm doing something for people"--that's one criteria.

Also, people who are looking for people to be with that are doing something about problems. We look for that. We don't ask questions like, "Are you looking for something to do?" Our screening process I'll explain in a minute. And the third thing that we figure is really important is that we need people who are willing to grow. That means you have to have some things going for you, such as: You have to be open to something.

This is a typical example of a guy we screened a year and a half ago, who is now our publicity director. This little 16-year old Catholic high school boy came in from a very rich family. His father owns this big restaurant in San Carlos, and he's led this very rigid life, and he came walking into the switchboard. We were screening him, and we asked him things like, as soon as we said the word sex, he just freaked out--you know, "What are you talking about this for? The pope says..." You know, he was really in that place. But when he went through training, we could see something in him. He started asking questions: "Well, how do you feel about it? What does that mean?", etc. So we let him on, only because he was open, though he was very narrow in what he understood, but he was open to understanding what other people felt. That's what growth is. You don't have to change yourself necessarily. All you have to be is open to where other people are, and you grow.

We do a pre-screening. We do it in a group. If anybody's ever been screened for a job, or any kind of thing where you come in, and these people are looking at your application, and there's 4 of them, and they're sitting there going, "Aha," and they start asking you very pointed questions, and you're sort of sitting there going, "Um, what are they expecting from me?" Well, what we do is work it the other way around. We'll screen 4 people who are volunteering at the same time that there are 4 who are now on the switchboard. So we'll do a large group, and we start with, "What are your expectations? What are you expecting from the switchboard?" That may seem like a very silly question, but it's amazing how many people will cut themselves out just with that.

OK, we go from a large group to a role play situation which is one to one. Each person that's a listener now takes one of the people who's volunteering. We do this for 3 hours. It's a 3-hour process. It's about an hour of group. It's about a half hour of evaluation where they sit out and get to talk to each other. The little tight group of the in-crowd sits there and talks and says what they were feeling about them, what they're feeling about themselves. Then we go into a role play situation. We do what they do, which is, I take a real problem that I have or have had, and I just start bringing it out, and I see how they respond to it. You'll find out an awful lot about how open they are when you say, "I really think my mother messed me up." Some people will go, "Well, you know, your mother couldn't help it," but they might listen. They might at least be open to listening, and that's kind of how we do our screening. It's one of the most enjoyable parts of our training. I think I enjoy screening more than anything.

Ms. Schonberg

We just picked up pre-screening for the first time this session. We've done 6 training sessions, and we just began pre-screening, because we had a lot of calls from people that we thought were really in a place where they wouldn't be able to handle a situation over the phone. So we said, "Wow, to have them go all the way through training and then have them screened out at the end seems really not only a waste of our time, but a waste of theirs." So we began pre-screening, and our situation of screening, just because it was the first time, we did the basic things too: "Why do you want to be on the switchboard? What kinds of things can you offer us? What kinds of things can we offer you to better yourself as a person and share? Our whole training is sharing.

One situation was a case where a woman was really in a place where I felt really funny about it. The feelings I was getting, you know, she was really coming down and saying, "I really think this girl should have done this." I said, "Wow, let's talk about it," but she was really open. Our training is so intense and relatively long, that if someone is open, they're going to last through the whole training session, and at the end they should be in pretty good shape.

One of the things we do is, nightly we have a small group situation for about 2 hours. Everybody has to be helper and helpee too, so you get to have a problem and help one, and it's a situation where every time that happens, not only the person that they directly work with gives them feedback about how they did, but the whole group says, "Gee, that was really good what you said there, and that really made me feel good." So each night they have a pretty good idea of where they're at. We do it for each area. We're much more structured, and there's disadvantages with that too.

One of the things we do is, like one night we do sexuality, and the person will, like John said, be really blown out by sexuality or drugs. Drugs is a common area. Many people feel funny about talking in the common street language about drugs, so we say, "Gee, you feel kind of funny about this area; you're doing OK. Why don't we take an extra 15 minutes afterwards or at another time to work on it some more?" So our screening is them feeling comfortable with what they're doing, and if they're feeling comfortable, usually we're feeling comfortable. By the end we said, "OK, you said you're feeling uncomfortable in drugs, so maybe we can work some more on that before you go on the phones, but otherwise, you listen really well." Specific feedback is one of the most important things in screening.

Mr. Calkins

Training becomes screening too. You start out with a lot of people, and training eliminates a lot of people, because it is intensive. It does require growth. It does require all the things we look for in our pre-screening.

Question

How long is your training?

Ms. Schonberg

Our training is twice a week for 4 weeks, and it's 4 hours each time. Our director came from Michigan, and his training session was 2 weeks, 6 nights a week for 4 hours. We talked him into spreading it out a little more.

Mr. Calkins

Our training is three 5-hour sessions and two 3-hour sessions spread out on weekend days and week nights, 3-hour sessions on week nights. Our trainings are kind of diametrically opposed, and yet the same. We just approach the thing from a different angle, because of the skills we've got and the place we've come from; but essentially, we're doing the same thing.

Question

Do you bring your volunteers together at periodic intervals for group discussion?

Ms. Schonberg

We have something called on-going training. We have a staff meeting every Monday night, and half the meeting is just business--you know, "This shift is open; who's going to take it?" The other half of the meeting is devoted to growing. We continue role playing. At least once a month we do some role plays. By then we have a good idea of what kinds of calls are coming in, and so we take specific calls, or we take a situation that maybe someone had a hard time with. Like yesterday I turned and said, "Wow, I really had a hard time with that; next Monday would you role play it out with me?"

We also have speakers come in all the time from different agencies. We always have on-going training. We have retreats to get us back in touch with ourselves as a group. We're really a tight group, and it's important that we maintain that. If you don't like the people you're working with, you don't do much good with people at the other end of the line. So we are socially a very tight group.

Question

Are all of your callers under 30, or are all of your people under 30? Do you feel involved with all age groups?

Mr. Calkins

That's a really good question as far as directions. All of our people aren't under 30 on our switchboard, and all of them aren't under 30 on Liz's. Our biggest chunk of people are from 19 to 25. We have right now 5 people 30 or over; that's out of 40, which is a very small percentage. It's hard to get adults involved in something on a volunteer basis, because they have a lot of responsibilities of their own. One of the things I hear you saying, and I'll just amplify it all to heck, is that the only way a switchboard is going to be effective is to be a group of people that comes from the community, which means you've got to have older adults. You have to have good representation, and I will emphasize over and over again that the most important thing in making that function properly is that people feel good about each other on that switchboard.

We do on-going training essentially the same as Liz's group. We approach it a little differently, but it's basically the same idea. The most important thing is people being able to feel good about each other, know each other's strengths and weaknesses. There's a lot of power in a group that isn't in an individual, and I can't emphasize that enough. That's one of the most important things, feeling good about the people you're working with. It makes you work a lot better.

Ms. Schonberg

I just wanted to say that you really hit on a sensitive point when you asked if we were all under 30. Most of our volunteers are, and I've spent the last year trying to figure out what we can do about it. I'm more concerned that we have very few Third World people involved at our switchboard, and that concerns me, because we're in a target area, and I'm directly involved with the target area, and yet, very few people are involved as volunteers.

Our calls come from a really wide range, and it's interesting to get an old person saying, "Wow, you're the same age as my daughter, but it doesn't seem to matter. You're still listening to me." Also it helps in terms of parent relationships too. One of the things that's happened in our area is that there are switchboards set up kind of for different age groups. It's interesting, because Connect in Palo Alto is a much older group, and they have a handful of young volunteers, and they keep saying, "We want more young volunteers." We say the same thing about older volunteers. I've spent the last year trying to figure out what to do. We've gone to Fun Over 50 Club several times and said, "We are starting a new training session; come." We go to many older organizations and say, "We really need volunteers. We want to represent the community."

Besides the fact that older people don't have necessarily the time, it is volunteer, and there's absolutely no payment except for your good feelings about it. There's also the aspect that the training is geared to a lot of the problems that are happening right now. One of the things we found before we did pre-screening, we had a lot of people drop out after the first night. We could never figure it out. We'd follow up on them and say, "Gee, you dropped out; is there anything we can do? Can you help us figure out what we did wrong?" One of the things we found was, just in the drugs, some of the language was hard for some of the people to pick up. We really went out of our way to get situations where--you know, "This is what it means; let's see if you can do that." At the same time, many of the older volunteers felt that if they got a drug OD, their morals might get in the way. That was something that we said, "If that's how you feel, we can work on that and change that together, or we can, you know--I mean, you're not going to get just suicide calls all the time you're there; you're going to get a range, and it's important that you can work with all of those areas."

Comment

Working with senior citizens--that is a tremendous area. I've found at the library that some of the older patrons will come up, and they don't want to speak with the younger librarians. They only want to speak with the older reference librarians; and the reverse is true also.

Mr. Calkins

We do have one senior citizen. One of the things I would mention there is the age-old communication gap, or generation gap, or whatever it is. Our training tends to be geared toward a certain area, which is one thing that we talked about last night. How can we gear our training toward a broader area? How can we emphasize things that are common between people so that we can involve more adults. We've got some really good ideas. I just wish I had another hour to lay out some of the things we came up with last night, as far as emphasis and ways to get people to work together who come from different places.

Question

Have you thought of holding a training session in a senior citizen center? Also, have you looked at the possibility of transporting senior citizens to the switchboard?

Mr. Calkins

That's a problem, and it's something that we've worked on, even with our high school kids who don't drive or don't have a car. We pretty much will help people out with transportation. Our senior citizen has become our biggest taxi driver. She goes around and picks everybody up. She loves everybody down there and is busy going to pick people up all the time.

Question

How do you get your telephone number out to the community? I know with the younger people word easily gets around just by word of mouth, but you said you have a lot of older people calling in. How do you get your number to the older people in the community?

Mr. Calkins

Let me answer from one aspect, and then Liz can answer from another aspect. They tended to do their publicity a little bit differently than we did. We used to do a lot of banner flying, leafleting, card handing outing, radio publicity; and for some reason, it wasn't getting us the kind of calls we thought we should be getting. One of the things I've been doing is getting directly involved with the community. If you do that, and you go, let's say, to an association of ministers, you get some good contacts with them, and they get to understand what you're doing, then when they get a problem, they can make a referral to you. In other words, it becomes more word of mouth. I don't know how many people get tired of being leafleted, but I do. When I get a leaflet, I tend to glance at it, and it has all these beautiful things, but then I kind of set it aside, and it never hits me; but if a person walks up and says, "I had a really good experience," or, "I feel really good about this thing, so maybe you could..." That's been our approach to publicity for the last 8 months. I think it needs a little bit of both.

Question

Can a person get hold of the switchboard through the telephone information operator?

Mr. Calkins

That's an interesting question. One of the things we've complained about is that there is no listing for switchboards in the Yellow Pages. If you've ever tried to get a switchboard in an area... What I've done is, I've gone to the General Administration Office in San Francisco--I'm going to present this to the federation--and I said, "We would like a listing in the Yellow Pages; what do we do?" I've got this whole bureaucratic thing I've got to go through--letters, and forms, and talking to this and that person. They referred me around, and now I know what to do. That's one thing we've been working on, getting the word out to the Telephone Company. I'm sure they're swamped at times with some of the most amazing requests and don't know what to do with them.

Question

How are you listed now?

Mr. Calkins

We're listed under Whole Earth Project, under "Recreation Programs" in San Carlos and Belmont. That makes it very difficult for somebody, when they look under "Recreation," to interpret that they might get something from us that they need. Every switchboard--I've looked through the phone book and found some and can't find others. Some are listed by their name in the white pages. We're in the Yellow Pages under "Recreation." They're under "Social Services." In the green pages, we've never gone about, as switchboards, saying what we'd like to be tagged under, but I've gone to that Administration Office and said, "I'm listed under 'Recreation,' and I'm not happy with that, so what can I do to change it?" It takes a lot of work to change it. The Telephone Company is kind of overwhelmed too, so we've got to work with them.

Ms. Schonberg

I just want to say one thing about this, and that is, we do it a lot different. We have a printer on our board, so we're really into cards and things. I've been the major publicity person on our switchboard for a few months. We made a slide tape presentation, which we take with us when we talk about the switchboard. One of the things we found with publicity for us is that there are different levels: To attract callers, and we have bumper stickers that say "365-CARE" in huge, gaudy, bold printing; to get volunteers around training session time, and we go into classrooms and clubs. We try to get money, which means a much different pitch, in terms of dressing differently, having your slide tape with you, smiling. So publicity involves a whole lot of different things.

Ms. O'Donnell

Thank you. I know you have other questions, but we do have another speaker. Thank you so much. It was really interesting.

ARE LIBRARIANS TRAINED TO BE COMMUNITY INFORMATION SPECIALISTS?

Fay Blake

Peggy O'Donnell

Yesterday we discussed somewhat, the question of training librarians in being good urban specialists or information specialists, as well as be able to listen, or be able to handle problems, or to make the right referrals. I knew that Anne Kincaid had recently been at an institute in Atlanta which involved directors of eight library schools who had been doing projects on training information specialists in just this kind of thing. When she said she was going to this conference, she didn't know exactly what was happening, because she had been asked to attend as an observer; but I thought it would be interesting to see what library schools were doing in this area. So when she got back, I rushed down and said, "Well, what did you find out?" It was very gloomy news. In most of these cases, the program was funded federally, and the funds were gone; but even if they had funds, they had not been able to decide what community meant, what information meant, and what inventory of community needs was. So they had a great deal of trouble with the feasibility study, I guess--you know, deciding what they were trying to do, and then trying to decide how they felt library school students should be trained in this area. There seemed to be a great deal of discussion on that, and conflict. So I don't think we can look tomorrow to too many of these specialists, though there hopefully will be a few.

When I was planning for this workshop, and I knew what Anne had told me, I got in touch with Fay Blake at UC Berkeley, because I knew she was interested in this, and I thought you might enjoy hearing her views, ideas, concepts of this problem in relation to training library students who will be working with us in the future. She very graciously agreed to join us and share her thoughts with us. Fay.

Ms. Blake

Somehow that adjective, gracious, doesn't apply to me. That's not how most of you think about me.

The flyer that I got that describes this workshop very modestly asks the question, "Should the public library make an effort to provide community switchboard service?" I would suggest that the question before the public library is really, "Can we afford not to provide community switchboard service?" I'd even go so far as to say that if the public library does not quickly redirect its resources towards providing services and information to those whom we've traditionally ignored, then the public library stands a good chance of quietly going down the drain. Harried public officials and cities in acute crises are going to, and in some cases they already have, become very stingy about allocating funds to the public library which provides only traditional services. The housewives out after the latest best-sellers, and the investors who want the latest stock market quotations, and even the high school students with a social science assignment really have alternatives available to them in satisfying their demands; or, at the very worst, if city fathers stop allocating money to the public library, their demands will go unsatisfied.

The real crisis is one which libraries haven't really attacked very technically, and in some cases, not at all. I want to quote to you from a description issued by the late lamented Urban Information Specialist Program at the University of Maryland. I think they describe what the real crisis is. They say:

> *The critical social problem is the lack of access to information by people and organizations in the urban setting. Existing information agencies and channels are inadequately responding to the need which ghetto residents have for information in their individual and social lives. As a consequence of this severe information deprivation, individuals are denied options and opportunities which otherwise would be theirs, while more major responses to the urban crisis, such as community control efforts, are left without crucial information, backing and support. While the importance of information has come to be generally recognized in such other settings as industry and the military, its importance*

> *to local communities and individual citizens is still largely overlooked, and such programs as do exist function largely to supply the needs of professional workers in the urban setting. The average person is still outside the range of such efforts, and important cultural barriers remain to be overcome before the situation will be altered appreciably.*
>
> *Until the problem of information access is recognized and overcome, other positive social efforts simply cannot succeed. Therefore, information access remains one of the key social problems of the inner city. One reason this situation exists and continues is because there presently is no group of especially prepared professionals equipped by background to work in the inner city and possessing the technical and human skills to provide and disseminate information where and when it is needed. Educational preparation in librarianship does not focus on this environment, and the types of people who are attracted into this profession have neither the background, interest, or ability needed for inner city work. Further, the educational programs in this field are still only cautiously moving into claiming an information role for libraries. The consequence is to reinforce the passive, book-centered role which libraries have traditionally played. The library, a socially conservative institution still committed to educated, middle-class clientele, will remain caught in its tradition unless socially responsive programs are introduced by pace-setter institutions.*

That's quite an indictment, isn't it? It seems to me that switchboard service providing real information about a community to the members of that community has to become an essential part of the public library's function, maybe even, if necessary, at the expense of some of its traditional functions. I'm under no illusions about how easily a public library can establish a community switchboard service, not just the technical difficulties of discovering the community's needs, or deciding what a community is, or discovering and updating the kind of information switchboards dispense. As a profession, I think we librarians are essentially pretty damn good at getting information, and I would have a great deal of confidence in our ability, ultimately, to define the community, and discover the resources of that community, and the information needs of that community, and eventually, even to supply the information needs of that community; but what we're really battling here is much more subtle. The switchboard operation is in basic opposition to the conventional role of the library and is, therefore, under attack both internally and externally. The city fathers don't want to do it. We don't want to do it ourselves.

The switchboard is, first of all, not book-oriented. You don't get caught up-to-the-minute on what's going on in the community from books. By the time it gets into books, it isn't going on any more. For those to whom the library is still a warehouse of books, a repository, a place for the storage and circulation of books, a place where a community of scholars can find what they need--for those people the switchboard concept is anathema, and some of those people are in our own ranks.

Secondly, the switchboard is not primarily for the middle class, our traditional clientele. Some of the switchboard's information is spilling over into the middle class. Middle class kids get hooked on drugs, and they get arrested. Middle class space engineers get laid off from their jobs, and they need information about jobs and about welfare. But, essentially, the legal, the medical, the welfare, the abortion, the drugs, the half-way house, the suicide, the job information that a switchboard dispenses is for people in trouble. And poor people, and working class people, and black people, and brown people, and young people are in more trouble than middle-class suburbia.

Thirdly, the successful operation of a switchboard means: 1) You won't find the information you need in the conventional sources librarians have always used, so you'll have to seek out and cultivate subcultures, underground sources, anti-establishment types. 2) You won't be able to make a dent with these subcultures as long as you, yourself are fully identified with the "Establishment." The best information about where an ex-con can go for help comes from ex-cons who have gone the road. What reason has an ex-con to share what he knows with you, with me, as long as he identifies us with the whole system that made an ex-con out of him? What I'm trying to indicate is that much of a switchboard's success is based on the information available only surreptitiously, or at least cautiously, and that your ability to get such information will require a certain commitment from you to societal change. Finally, a successful switchboard requires librarians with an outlook and an education that library schools are not prepared to give.

I'm not coming here as an expert. I don't have all the answers. I don't have any of the answers, but I have a few ideas that I'm trying out in my classes. I'll welcome from you any other ideas that you're willing to share with me. I think, maybe, if we begin to get our feet wet a little bit, we'll be instituting in library schools new ways to library education that we haven't considered before.

It seems to me, the library school that isn't consciously and deliberately recruiting students and faculty from the unconventional world can't possibly provide education or service to that world. A library school needs students and faculty who work accurately in urban organizations, who are of the ethnic minority, who are sensitive to many different kinds of people and to their needs for many different kinds of information. A library school with a faculty consisting only of distinguished white male scholars and administrators will be able to turn out only distinguished (more or less) white male scholars and administrators--and administrators, you understand, are scholars who can't write with footnotes.

To say we have conventional recruiting in a library school is not exclusively an internal matter, or it shouldn't be. It's your profession, and your demands on library schools to educate for new priorities could make a difference. My experience has been that the library school doesn't want your ideas, and it's also been that you don't insist on making us listen to you. It's also been my experience that librarians cling pretty firmly to the library school curriculum they themselves experienced, deadly dull as it was, and that librarians resist radical change in the school. For example, you don't hire our graduates if they haven't taken a traditional reference course, even though you admit among yourselves that you can't remember one, single, solitary item from your reference courses, or that they've long since been superseded.

Now, that brings me to some of the course changes a switchboard operation might demand from a library school. The reference course I've been teaching (and I see some of my graduates here; they can tell you) is deliberately pitched at non-conventional sources. To prepare a bibliography on the literary heritage of Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans for a community college ethnic studies department, which my reference class does, it won't help you a bit to know the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals or the Dictionary of National Biography, although before the course is over, you may very well have referred to both. To discover what machismo, pornography, Joe Hill, mean, you'll need to go further than Webster's Third and the Encyclopedia Britannica. In other words, the course is designed, as far as I can do so, to get the students to go beyond conventional reference sources, to get the students to deal with solving problems, not with finding book answers to ready reference questions.

To see reference in action, some of the assignments lea them to a variety of reference desks, and to some horrifying experiences there. Some of the assignments lead them to a variety of reference librarians. A variety of reference librarians are invited to come to them as guest speakers. And some of the assignments, I hope, lead the students to recognize the importance of people, both as resources and the recipients of information. We use role playing. We critically analyze reference books' biases, as exhibited both by omission and commission, like the assignment on Geronimo. Do you know what our children's encyclopedias have to tell our children about Geronimo? Look some time. We give them assignments by design deliberately controversial, rather than bland problems. We talk about food additives, and sex education in the schools, and abortion, and civil rights.

Other courses I teach are also meant to turn the new librarians to ethical, human, contemporary and controversial issues. We talk about racism, and women's lib, and planned parenthood in the course that's called "The Librarian in Society." It was only after I started to give it that I discovered that's not what you're supposed to talk about at all. You're supposed to talk about the history of libraries. The students pick a library and critically analyze how it relates to these current, controversial issues.

In the spring I'll be teaching a seminar on the status of women in librarianship. I hope the students in that course will actually explore just what libraries and library schools do about and with women--real libraries, maybe yours; you'd better look out, and real problems--and I expect to evolve with my students some of the activities that could be ingrained in women themselves as in men, and possible to change only if men and women work together to correct inequities.

I'll also be teaching a course called "Municipal and County Libraries." Now, that's a title that makes me yawn whenever I see it, and I can just imagine the students' reaction to it. I'm sure they have delightful visions of county administrative charts and some of the heart-stopping matters we used to have in high school civics courses. I don't intend to deal with any of that hogwash. What I do intend to do is explore with the students whether and how a city and a county library can become a community organizing agent, how it establishes a switchboard, how it turns its own organization from a hierarchical to a collegial system as a model to the community, how it makes its facilities available and usable to the community within which it exists and for which it exists.

Mr. Berninghausen of the University of Minnesota Library School would probably suggest that I'm subverting the whole profession of librarianship. I don't believe it. I came into this profession after a lot of experience in unions, in political work, and in community organizing. I came into the profession because I believed it was committed to service, and to me, the whole purpose of service is giving people a crack at enriching their own lives. Since I entered the profession, some of my colleagues, including Mr. Berninghausen, have made a damn good try at changing my mind. The library profession, they've been telling me, is only committed to serving a few people--that tiny elite which reads and uses the library to get reading materials. Well, they haven't convinced me--not yet, but they're trying. The whole ballgame is still in expanded, imaginative, sensitive service to more people, not fewer; and I'm not willing to let students at Cal's Library School leave the school without at least being exposed to the ideas of library school as it might be.

More important than any conventional course to the sensitizing and preparing of librarians to take on switchboard responsibilities is a whole new area that's giving me lots of work, and lots of heartache, but lots of pleasure, too. I'm pushing a thing that we call field placements for which the students can get credit. Field placement is not an internship. It's not where the student goes into the library, does a bit of cataloging, does a bit of reference, a bit of book selection, and comes out a skilled librarian--or a plumber. The student chooses a field placement agency from about two dozen different ones that we've evolved. Not all of them are libraries. There are some in museums, legal aid societies, undergraduate libraries, hospitals, jails and prisons. He devises a project which will be of service to the agency and of educational value to him. He participates in decision making at the agency. He consults with a faculty advisor, and he submits a critical and analytical paper at the end of the quarter.

The "he" I've been using is generic. Somebody ought to come up with a pronoun that implies both. "Heesh" has been suggested.

The San Francisco County Jail Project is one of these field placements. It has been going on for over a year now. There are difficulties and problems, but the students who are engaged in that project have been better equipped for the demands of a switchboard operation than I ever was by the courses I took in library school. Ask them. They're out there on the front lines of what library service is all about.

Question

You say what library service is all about. Would you want to explain that a little bit more? Isn't that what library service is all about in certain situations and under certain circumstances? There may be different types of library service, and maybe what we ought to try to do is identify the different types of services, and where those services can be directed, and who can benefit from those different services.

Ms. Blake

That, I suppose, is the ideal; but what you're saying gives me some vibrations, some overtones analagous to the white males who are now filing suits about how they're being discriminated against by affirmative action programs. I never noticed those white males--or their fathers, I guess--filing suits when whole categories of Third World people and women were being discriminated against quite openly, quite blatantly, quite viciously, without affirmative action programs. It's when the reverse has to take place, when a new priority is being established, that we get all these heart-stopping feelings about how we're achieving the other kinds of service;but we are, and we're going to. Some of the businessmen aren't going to get what they're used to getting from public libraries. If you're really serious, if you really mean service to the people you've never served, you're going to have to stop serving some of the people you used to, as well as you used to.

Question

I'm not objecting to the change in priorities. I'm just objecting... Suppose you have a community where the make-up of the community consists of a population of 200, let's say; and during the daytime the population consists of 10,000 because the rest of them are people who are coming in and working on jobs there, and their need is work oriented. Now, in that particular community, would you insist on a switchboard, or would you insist on a service that meets the needs of those...

Ms. Blake

No, of course, I insist on service that meets the needs of the community. I'm just saying that we've been blind to them, that lots of communities have been invisible to us. We never even defined the community.

Question

May I be controversial? I think everybody here is open-minded, or we wouldn't be here--right?

Ms. Blake

No, they're here to get a day away from that damn library.

Question

Well, are we training students to become frustrated librarians? The problem as I see it is that we come out of library school terribly enthusiastic with some of these marvelous new ideas, never able to implement them.

Comment

I'd like to give an answer to that. I was one of Ms. Blake's students. I don't know why you say you're never able to implement them. You have to keep shoving. If you don't shove, you're not going to make any change. It's the little pressures. The thing I think I gained most out of the ten courses that she described was a respect for the profession, which I don't think comes out of the traditional types of courses; and because I have a respect for the profession, I push for the ideals I feel should be implemented. Sure, I see a lot of things wrong with the library I'm working in now, but I feel I can make a contribution, and I can change some things. Sometimes that damn administrator up there is just horrible, but...

Comment

I think we're all idealistic. When I first got out of library school I got into a situation where I was able to do these things. Then I went from position to position, and I discovered that it becomes more and more frustrating, because you run against different personalities that you can't possibly be pushing. It's almost sad. We should be re-educating our administrators, not re-educating the students. They're open.

Comment

I'm looking forward to being an administrator.

Ms. Blake

I think one of the areas we have sadly neglected in the profession is our constant acceptance that a library has to be run hierarchically by administrators. We have to run libraries, and we have to change it so that we are running libraries.

Comment

I think that's one of the things that comes out of Fay's courses. She insists that we work in groups. This idea that no librarian is an island--you have to work with other librarians every day; and by stressing that in the school, I feel more willing to work with these people.

Comment

As a damn administrator, I think people coming out of library school with these new ideas should get to the administrators. It isn't necessarily that the administrators are unwilling. They may be just unaware. One of the reasons we're unaware is that a lot of us have been trying to change things in library schools for years, and library schools have been very resistant to change.

Ms. Blake

I said that. I said we don't want to hear you.

Comment [Cannot be heard]

Comment

If you're dealing with people on a feeling basis and not playing head games with them, you can feel better about the rotten spot you're in.

Comment

I'd like to pick up on something that you said in response to something that was asked awhile ago. You said that ultimately we will be the ones that will design the library. I'd like to ask, why aren't we going out and asking the user what he wants in the library, and have we really found out that there is a tremendous need for a switchboard or for more intensive information gathering and organization in a library? I've come from various kinds of libraries, and I've handled information in different ways, and the user is very often left out of the picture in terms of what we gather, how we present it. We're not going to design the library of the future. The user should be in there designing it for us so that we should respond to that. What's the library school doing about educating librarians to think about users?

Ms. Blake

Well, see, I'm not so anxious to think about users, because I think they have been thought about. What I'm interested in is the non-user, those people who either haven't heard about us and don't even know we exist, or those people who know we exist and know we don't answer their needs.

Comment

When I say user, I mean user and potential user. I'm sorry; let me define that term. I don't mean just the person who walks into the library. I mean the spectrum of people out there who are potential library users.

Ms. Blake

Well, all I can say is that my assignments or the projects that are done in all of my classes are done in groups and in real libraries; and they analyze the community. The library's community has a wide variety of definitions, but the assignments do analyze the relationship between the library and its community, its whole community, the community it doesn't serve, as well as the one it does.

Question

How?

Ms. Blake

How do they analyze it? Well, they use some of the traditional tools, if I can't push them into finding new ones. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of my students here. Why don't you tell them how you analyze some of the many ways you use?

Comment

My group took a junior high school library and sent out questionnaires to about 200 of the students. We found out what the library had in basic areas, checked the subject catalog and found out where things were placed, the attitude of the staff. Then we talked to students and evaluated the questionnaires and what priorities they had, and what they wanted the library to provide. We also went to the public libraries in the area to see how they complemented them.

Comment [Cannot be heard]

Ms. O'Donnell

I'd like to say one thing. I went to a traditional library school and was bored to death. I've been a librarian for a long time, and I have to say a good point for the older librarians, that the only reason I stayed in librarianship was because the librarians who trained me on the job told me to ignore library science and cataloging, and to get out into the community. So I was told to get out in the community and meet people, and it's a total concept of service. I then went on to be a librarian, but it was not until I came to BARC that I was able to come back to this concept. But I have to say that those people ten or fifteen years ago believed in it, so I don't think that we should say that it's all library schools, all administrators. It's really within ourselves. All these people here today, I don't care where your heads are completely, but if you're sympathetic at all, you're going to go back and affect a lot of people.

Ms. Blake

You realize I'm just trying to shock you into it. I overstate everything.

Question

Can I just say two things? What about changing the terminology from library science, which it isn't really, to library service, which it should be, and which would appeal to a lot more people, which would appeal to people who want to give service?

Ms. Blake

Yes, but it doesn't appeal to those white scholars there.

Question

White scholars know that library science is not a science. Then, if your dynamics and your ideas come across, what about giving your seminar to people who are already in libraries? You're right in addressing groups like this, but how can you communicate more with library administrators, who also many times are not administrators?

Ms. Blake

Well, one of the ways, of course, is by talking to them where they gather. I think you know that I do an awful lot of writing and publishing in the library press to communicate ideas that I have.

Comment

I just wanted to say something to the people who feel frustrated in their jobs, who say they can't make changes. Since you belong to a profession, you also have professional groups. For instance, when I was a student at San Jose State, we wanted to work on a prison project. We got help through Peninsula Library Association, and they gave us not only money, but they gave us professional advice and help. If you can't do anything on your job, look to your professional organizations to push through some new things and changes. I think that some things have been worked out down in San Jose through the cooperation of librarians, things that they could not have done in their own jobs.

Ms. O'Donnell

Any more questions? Thank you so much.

A SWITCHBOARD FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Gordon McShean

Peggy O'Donnell

I said earlier today that I could discover no program similar to some of them I found on the East Coast where libraries are operating as switchboards or information referral services. The ones I discovered in the East were mostly in the planning stages, but still, I think there is a great deal we can get from that kind of information. So our first speaker this afternoon, whom many of you know, I think, Gordon McShean, as a librarian has also worked as a switchboard volunteer, and he has the experience and information for both situations. He has developed a proposal for Stanislaus County Free Library for a switchboard in the library manned by volunteers. He'll be telling you about that, so that's all I'm going to say about it. In addition, he has also just recently returned from New Zealand where he has been visiting Citizens Advice Bureaus, which I mentioned this morning, as an example of the kind of citizen information services that have been available in other places. So I'm going to turn it over to Gordon at this point, and he'll share those experiences with us.

Mr. McShean

Thank you. I have enough here to keep you for a couple of days, but I'll try not to. Before I get started, I would like to mention that my interest in switchboards extends over the last couple of years at least, and I have an article that's been accepted by the California Librarian, and it will be appearing in the spring issue. It's called, "Switchboards, a threat to libraries?". It deals principally with some of the concern that's been expressed here, an underlying concern that perhaps the switchboard could be undermining the library's tax base. If a community decides that maybe it needs better information services that the library is providing, the libraries may find their tax dollars going to switchboards instead, which is one reason we should be thinking about taking switchboards over. Although the article is written really for the person who is unaware of what a switchboard is, I think you may find it interesting.

The other irrelevant thing I want to tell you--it has some slight relevancy because of the mention that has been made about sexual matters answered by switchboards--is that I am the task force coordinator of the American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Round Table Task Force on Sex Related Media, and I hope all of you who will be going to Las Vegas to the conference in the summer will show up at our Sunday evening program. We've got a room that will seat 600, and we have invited the editor of the magazine, Transvestia, in drag, to speak to us on the library's failure to inform the citizenry of the information that's relevant to sexual minorities. I think you'll find that interesting.

I'm really grateful for the opportunity to talk to you. I personally am totally sold on the switchboard. My experiences as a switchboard coordinator and as a volunteer are such that I felt them worthwhile in my work with libraries. I have at various times run middle size public libraries, and been a worker in libraries and university libraries, and I found the switchboard experience much more rewarding, and I'd kind of like to bring the two experiences together into one job, into what I hope to make my current job, and I'll tell you more about my current job a little later.

One of the things that could take a lot of time here, but hopefully won't, is my experience with the Santa Cruz switchboard. I spent almost a year, up until last summer, as a volunteer working for them, and as a special coordinator on various public relations matters. I was very grateful that a number of the previous speakers covered a lot of what I had done. They told you a lot of the things I've been through, because it seems to be a universal experience on switchboards. The crisis calls always pop up in your minds, but the majority of the switchboard work is just simple information. I hope that has come through to you in my questions to some of the previous speakers. You've got to keep it in mind that the majority of the volunteers' work is simply answering questions about the community. I think that is also the library's job.

I think I'll run over my New Zealand experience first, because I don't think it will cause too much controversy, and I think you'll be asking a lot more questions about my Stanislaus County project later on.

I spent a month in New Zealand, December into January, and because of my interest in switchboards, of course, I had to go to the Citizens Advice Bureau. I've also done a lot of work with children, and I had heard before I went down to New Zealand that the Auckland Citizens Advice Bureau had an innovative program on assistance to people under 16 in the area of sex--advice, help, etc. So that was one of my motivations for going and asking them what they were doing. I brought back a sheaf of pamphlets, some of them generated by the Citizens Advice Bureau, and some of them generated by other agencies in New Zealand.

Now, the Citizens Advice Bureaus in New Zealand are very similar to the British ones. They too kind of grew out of the war-time crises in the 2nd World War, and they were headed by social workers, not librarians, although some of the bureaus popped up in libraries. They popped up in store fronts, anywhere they could find space. Now they are funded by the municipalities in which they are located. They have social workers as their coordinators, and they have volunteers doing the actual contact work. I was quite interested--in Auckland, for instance, if you go through the training program to become a volunteer with the Citizens Advice Bureau, you end up with a beautiful plaque to hang on your wall. A certificate of proficiency shows that you've been through the course, everything signed. The deputy mayor signs it.

I also brought a description of their training program and was interested to see that they've gotten away from the old British idea of training as being many exams, one after the other. Instead, they're going our way of giving exams; that is, making people write an awful lot. He undergoes the training, and then goes out into the community and surveys the particular community, turns in the survey to the Citizens Advice Bureau, and this is adding to the Citizens Advice Bureau's files, so that there's constantly a file on agencies in the community to be built up, and I think it's a grand idea. It makes each volunteer have a particular contact in the community before he gets on the phone or talks to drop-ins.

This is a description of the sex information program for children. I was interested to find out that family planning, VD clinics, the women's liberation group, and med students were all involved in this program. If any of you have questions about this you can ask me. They are bureaucratized to about the same extent that we are. This is an application to the volunteer worker, and it has a little piece on the bottom for the interviewer to mark all of his impression of the person being interviewed.

Incidentally, there seems to be a wide difference in the way that people are made volunteers on switchboards in America. In Santa Cruz our volunteers received only a couple of hours of interview and training, during which time they might be told that they weren't suitable as volunteers. Then the actual initiation into the switchboard work was in working with another volunteer on the switchboard. If you got through about 6 weeks of that, you were then a volunteer, but you had to work under the tutelage of somebody else. Don't take it that what you heard about one switchboard necessarily relates to the interview techniques or welding techniques of another switchboard.

This form is one that I will be talking about later in relation to our Stanislaus County operation. This is from New Zealand again. It says, "I, So and So, being chosen and admitted as a Bureau worker of the Citizens Advice Bureau Service, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I will respect the client's confidence in all matters revealed to me in my capacity as a Bureau worker." Now, even librarians don't sign anything like that, and I personally wanted to hassle about confidentiality in our attempt to start a switchboard in Stanislaus.

This is a brief description of the summary of what goes on in the New Zealand Citizens Advice Bureau. What kinds of questions do they answer? All kinds. For example, questions about house purchasing, social security, legal aid, consumer problems, including hire purchase and hire purchasing credit, requests for advice in all kinds of family and personal problems, matrimonial disputes, differences with the landlord, tenant or neighbor, orders for eviction, the need to appeal against the decision of some statutory department, or difficulties about family budget. Then it goes on to tell who staffs the Citizens Advice Bureau, and so on.

Being funded by the municipality, they're able to put out a nice, little, flashy form. I found it quite interesting that this particular form is written in Polynesian as well as English. Their volunteers tend to be a little more mature than the ones in America, on the whole. They tend to be retired citizens, teachers, and the like, although university students are more and more involved.

This particular form that I got while I was there is about the Retirement Association of Auckland, and this too is one of the concerns of the Citizens Advice Bureau for the elderly. They advise on all of the concerns--housing, legal and medical matters that might be needed in living in New Zealand.

Another form: "Parents by Choice; talks and discussion evenings for adopted parents"--again, the Citizens Advice Bureau. Legal aid: We've got one almost similar to that in Santa Cruz. "The Plunkett Society offers you the Plunkett County Hospital Service." This is a type of midwife service, free. All over New Zealand you see Plunkett rooms advertised. I guess you go and talk to the Plunkett nurse.

The big difference, I think, between what's going on in New Zealand and what we've been trying to do here is that it's highly respectable. Some of these areas that we consider controversial by the bureaucracy have been adopted by the civil servants, and they think it perfectly natural that they should offer help in these areas; whereas we find we have to open a store front and fight the agencies to do these things.

This is a description of the training course that the Citizens Advice Bureau puts on, and it includes such courses as "Introduction to Social Work, Philosophy and Existing Agencies," and then a piece the Department of Maori and Island affairs so that you can understand about natives and islanders. They might come to you for help.

Incidentally, many of the materials treating the problems of the Maori or the islanders in New Zealand are covered in what the office does. This pamphlet is "Housing for Maoris and Islanders." It includes many of the regulations against discrimination, and also advice on how to purchase a house, and how to get the down payment, and who to see when you're ready to buy. That's all I'm going to tell you about New Zealand, unless you have specific questions.

Question

Who funds the Citizens Advice Bureau?

Mr. McShean

The municipality.

Question

So that the municipality itself has set this as a priority; whereas, we have to change our priorities in our municipalities?

Mr. McShean

There is a Federation of Citizens Advice Bureaus in the central office, but each Citizens Advice Bureau is independent.

Question

How long has this been going on in New Zealand?

Mr. McShean

Since the war, but not on the scale it is now, and it's only in the larger cities.

Question

Are these physically connected with libraries?

Mr. McShean

In New Zealand, I believe, only one, and it's just coincidental. It really has nothing to do with libraries. In England there have been many more instances of coordination with library programs.

I was stolen from the Santa Cruz Switchboard by Stanislaus County Library. It was mainly the money that did it. I couldn't exist as a volunteer much longer. It doesn't pay very well. I'm head of Program Development at Stanislaus, which is a Librarian III position. I'm in charge of circulation, the Audio-Visual Department, all public relations for the libraries in the county, and in the development of new programs, such as a switchboard. The library administration was knowledgeable about my interest and involvement in the switchboard when I was hired. In fact, the library had made a previous attempt before hiring me to establish a one-number referral system in the county, and had been knocked down by the County Board of Supervisors because of interagency jealosies. Everybody thought the library should be the central number that people called before going to other agencies. I can't explain the rationale about why some agencies were threatened by this kind of thing, but they were, and the library was told to forget it.

Now here I am, trying to do the same thing again, but making it much more general, not just an agency referral thing. I want to introduce volunteers. I want to put in a proper switchboard. I'll read you parts of the proposal I made.

> We recognize that there is a need in the county of Stanislaus, California, for a new service center to provide information about community and public resources which would provide referral information and advice upon application, and discussion of the personal problems of those consulting the service, and which would make fuller use and contribute to the resources already existing in the library's reference and outreach departments.
>
> It is also recognized that the best utilization of community resources and the best key to information about the continuing development of community resources and services would come from involving members of the community.

Now, one of the problems I have with this concept is that librarians resist the idea of community involvement, when it's spelled out to them that this means volunteers coming into the library and actually being able to give more information than the librarian could, because lots of librarians don't believe that that's possible.

My article that I mentioned previously, that will appear in California Librarian, mentions the fact that there was a study done about 2 years ago on reference services. This found that reference librarians answering matters concerned with immediate community information had approximately a 50% failure rate in answering them directly. It was my conviction that in switchboards we do much better than that, and that we consistently could do much better because we always had the library as a back-up. If we couldn't answer them, we could always refer them to the library; whereas the library very seldom ever referred anyone to us. To go on with the proposal:

> It is proposed that the library begin to build the information referrals and resources which such a service would need, asking professional staff members to assist in their creation and maintenance, and enlisting community agents, gaining and disseminating information. We would hope that the library would be able to contract with a group of volunteers from the community, and would provide telephone lines, desk space and the necessary information resources, that the trained members of this group could provide the service in conjunction with the library's regular reference service. Further, these lines would be connected with an answering service during the hours the library was closed so that callers could contact volunteers in their homes. The library will undertake to provide library resources, orientation training for the volunteers, and will schedule library staff members to undergo training in interviewing, counselling, and crisis handling techniques.

I think this is particularly important, not only that the library staff get the training, but that they work with the volunteers, side by side.

> It would be dedicated to the welfare of people of the county and to the principles of library service, spring from the group already established. It should be non-profit, non-political, and organized democratically. It should be able to command respect from the community, and should take no positions on issues which would be contrary to library policy.

That last bit sticks in the craw of some of the switchboard people who grew up and developed their switchboard techniques in Berkeley and so on, where anti-war activities and the like were very much the things that started switchboards going. We thought there was no way we could allow that in our switchboard and still keep it in the library, since that was a necessity of the library maintaining a neutral stance on everything.

> Its volunteers should have undergone, or be willing to undergo, a training in the use of the information files the library will provide, in understanding the other resources available in the library, and in interviewing, counselling, and crisis handling techniques. The volunteers should be alert to new community information resources and would pass this along to the library staff to include in their files. Most of all, they should be reliable in their commitment to spend the stated number of regular hours each week.

The last bit was written out of bitter experience. Many volunteers are not reliable in their commitment to the hours they are supposed to undertake, and I think anybody else who's been involved with switchboards will agree with me that the largest drop-out rate concerns the person who doesn't respect the schedule that has been set up, and eventually has to be told that if he's not going to be there, don't bother showing up at all any more.

> The program will be coordinated by a council made up of representatives of the library, a representative of the volunteers, and a representative of the number of interested community agencies. The first ones which come to mind are Community Action Commission, the Council on Aging, the Welfare Department, the Department of Mental Health, and the Stanislaus Drug Abuse Coordinating Council. All representatives would have a vote and a voice in establishing policy for the service, and the library and volunteer representatives would hold equal power. The information provided by the service would cover community resources and matters concerning the welfare of community members. It would in no way attempt to represent the county or its agencies in an official capacity.

It goes on to say that talk calls would not be encouraged. They would be tolerated if they did not block other service functions, and if the person calling appeared to be in need. I personally hate this cop out. I think the talk call is very important, but this is in here because of the concern a lot of people seem to have that these are wasteful, that they don't serve any purpose, and so on.

> Outside volunteer services, such as home visits, delivery schedules, check-up calls, and the like would not be handled, but would be referred to other community agencies.

Then I go on to funding, and I made no attempt to estimate costs or find a source of funding. I saw no point in going into that stage without first finding out the reaction of the community to the proposal. Anyway, we first have to get money before we do this. We have these volunteers ready to go. We have training and resource people ready to be trained.

We've conducted a community survey, of sorts, through existing services and agencies and find they all are interested and think we need this kind of thing. So we wrote to the County Legal Council with the total proposal and said, "What's wrong with it? What will happen to it? What are the problems with it?" We received back possible problems in the following areas: 1) liability from negligence, the matter of insurance coverage; 2) privileged communication, and this is where I am really frustrated and upset in trying to do something. We will not go ahead until this matter has been cleared up.

> Confidential information provided to doctors, lawyers, and in some cases, government employees is often protected from disclosure. It appears that the representatives of the library could not be in any such category. The caller should, therefore, be told that anything he says might be repeated.

Implicit in this, of course, is repeated to law enforcement authorities. Reference librarians don't do that, and yet, from what he says, they should be doing it. I went to quite a number of my friends on switchboards and asked what their experiences had been with law enforcement authorities, and in every case it's been the same. There's been no real on-paper agreement from law enforcement authorities that there will be a no-bust policy; but there's a tacit agreement to that effect. The police recognize the fact that these switchboards are keeping delinquents off the streets. They're keeping people busy. They're solving a lot of social problems that would probably involve the police. So when one specific legal problem comes up that the police might run to the switchboard and bust somebody for, they're not doing it, in order to keep the switchboard open. But here we have the County Legal Council member saying that before anybody says anything, we have to tell people that anything they might say may be taken down and used against them.

It is particularly bitter if you know Stanislaus County Library. Until a few months ago Zoia Horn worked there. I don't know if you know about Zoia, but she is the lady who went to jail for 21 days for refusing to divulge information on the Berrigan Brothers case. It's exactly the principle. It's the matter of does a librarian, or a library representative, or a volunteer working on a switchboard in the library have the right to withhold information from law enforcement authorities. I personally think they have an obligation from a personal principle standpoint, but the legal authorities think differently.

Question

Is the Public Health Department in Stanislaus County involved with this at all?

Mr. McShean

Yes, through mental health services.

Question

So if you could get a physician, say, to say he's "supervisor," then it would be confidential, wouldn't it?

Mr. McShean

I don't think any professional person that has privileged communications legally can delegate that to anyone else. It's the same as a lawyer allowing his aide to do legal work.

Comment

I'm not a physician. I'm a health counsellor, but I work in a medical center, and we are not allowed to give out this information. It's completely confidential.

Mr. McShean

Well, I wonder how legal it is though.

Comment

Kaiser is a fairly conservative organization as far as that kind of thing goes, and I don't think they'd allow it. I worked in a similar setting for 8 years, and we were always told that if a subpoena should come that we would have to honor the subpoena; and just twice in 8 years did we ever provide any kind of records to any governmental agency.

Mr. McShean

This has been the position of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of ALA, that we would fight any request for information from the library's files about patrons, until the point of the subpoena, and then we must divulge the information, but we would fight up until that point. Personally, I think that's no protection at all.

Frankly, maybe this legal counsel is on our side. Maybe he's really up-front and wants to let people know that no matter what you say about confidentiality, it isn't. Maybe it would be a good thing for people to know. The other concern that counsel had was that care must be taken not to practice a professionally licensed occupation without the necessary license. Maybe we could initiate some state license for switchboard volunteers.

Question

Why do you have to know who the person is you're talking with, and even if you know who they are, why do you have to remember what you talked about? You don't write everything down.

Mr. McShean

That's true, but if you should happen to know who they are, or happen to know any identifying characteristics, if you know it's a mother with 3 children who recently came from Oklahoma, this is a good indication to the police; and if you should happen to claim to forget that kind of information, and later on it's proved that you did know that, you've perjured yourself.

Question

How do you expect the connection to be made?

Mr. McShean

Who knows? The connection wouldn't be made through the line. When you work on a switchboard there are so many instances where the call involves something that might be extra-legal, and you can't really tell. The problem can come from a number of directions. If the person you've just helped with a drug matter gets busted on the street, and he's got materials from the switchboard in his pocket, the police could come in and say, "What was he in about? What did he tell you he'd been smoking?"

Question [Cannot be heard.]

Mr. McShean

If our switchboard were to operate out of a storefront, but the idea of the library being traditionally representative of the straight-laced values--this is our problem. You wouldn't really be advising them, but then the police wouldn't be harassing you either. We can anticipate that if we operate out of a library basement that the police might harass us.

Question

Wouldn't it be better to coordinate with some outside body like the library, working together instead of apart?

Mr. McShean

Well, that's what we're trying to do, coordinate with an existing agency. This volunteer group that was previously working on drugs are going to be a volunteer agency working out of our basement; but they'll no longer have the protection they had when they were operating independently, because they'll be liable to some kind of supervision by the county. We're a county agency, and we're responsible for them.

Question

Couldn't they remain independent and still work informally with you?

Mr. McShean

Did you notice that I have there things in here that you can't violate library policy? This is the only way we can allow them to operate out of the library basement. Now, as a dedicated switchboard person, I have it in mind that maybe they'd be better off working independently; but then I have to give up the whole concept of the library and the switchboard cooperating ever. I can see the switchboard operation going the way of Citizens Advice Bureau in Britain, being funded separately, having social workers at their head, and having nothing to do with libraries, in which case they'll be a great threat to libraries, because they're a tax drain too, and they're providing an information service that many people have presumed the library should be providing. We'll no longer have the justification of saying we need more money because we need more information services. The Citizens Advice Bureau will be doing that.

Question

Could a person stand on his own rights against self-incrimination?

Mr. McShean

Well, Zoia did that and went to jail for 21 days.

Question

It bothers me that you had to include that because this is a library we need to present both sides of everything. If someone called for abortion information, would you also give her the number of the local Catholic priest so that he could talk her out of it? If not, you're not presenting both sides, you see, if you just present abortion information.

Mr. McShean

Well, if anyone asks us for information on making a bomb, do we also give them pacifist literature? We don't, do we? We have it available. We have a non-advocacy position. If we were to push either side, we would be in violation of the non-advocacy position.

Question

I was wondering how much the library at Santa Clara County is interested in doing this kind of thing that you want to do.

Mr. McShean

Well, everyone I've talked to informally is very much in favor of it. We already have a considerable resource file of agencies and resources in the area. I think we'll know when it comes down to money, when we find out how much the thing costs. We'll also know when we come up with the logistics of how the volunteers can get in and out of the basement without bothering the catalogers.

Question

How much full time library staff are you projecting for this?

Mr. McShean

So far we haven't projected any full time library staff. I will be working as coordinator of that, at least tentatively, unless someone else volunteers for it, in addition to all my other jobs, if I don't freak out first.

Question

Who's going to coordinate all the volunteers?

Mr. McShean

The volunteer group themselves. They'll be more or less autonomous. We only anticipate funding problems with the money for telephone lines and possibly some publicity materials. I think we might even be able to squeeze the publicity out of the library's budget.

Question

Does any of the library staff want to do volunteer work on the switchboard?

Mr. McShean

A number have expressed an interest. In talking with the county librarian, I understood that professional librarians interested in working with the volunteers would be able to take a certain amount of time out of their regular duties to do this.

COMPILING A DIRECTORY OF ALTERNATIVES

Shirley Lustig

Peggy O'Donnell [Ms. Lustig was late in arriving]

I really am glad that Shirley got here. It was a combination of errors, and it's as much my fault as hers, since I didn't coordinate the time. So with that, we have one member of the People's Yellow Pages Collective here. I'm sure you're all familiar with People's Yellow Pages, so I'm not going to say anymore about it. I'd just like to introduce to you one if its members, Shirley Lustig.

Ms. Lustig

I hate to meet everybody's expectations of the counter culture by being late, but I've done it. At least you know you're not going to get a canned speech; I have no idea of what I'm going to say. What I'd kind of like to do is get an idea of what you'd like to know about, what your interest is, from what point of view; because I could start off anywhere, and I thought I'd find out where your starting point is.

Question from audience

I'd like to know how you got the idea, and how you went about gathering the information.

Ms. Lustig

The idea came out of job hunting, because I couldn't find a job. What I found was the American Friends Service Committee which runs a project called New Vocations. Is that a new one on everybody? OK, I'll explain it.

You're no doubt aware that college graduates in the liberal arts fields have absolutely no possibilities of walking into a decently-paying job. Business graduates, accounting graduates--people with so-called trades--can get jobs, though they're hard to get; but English majors, psychology majors, sociology majors, etc., are just turned loose out of the colleges every year with no prospects of jobs.

I was in that position in 1970. I graduated from San Francisco State with a BA in art, and didn't intend to teach. So there I was--no job, no prospects; and I found the American Friends Service Committee New Vocations Center which specializes in dealing with people in just that boat.

What they do is to encourage people to go out on their own, to make their own jobs, find their own place within an organization that they particularly like. That's very nebulous; it's hard to lay your hands on that. Really, being in art, I could do my own thing. There's nothing to keep me from painting; but I wanted an involvement with people. I really liked what the Friends were doing, and I started hanging around the Service Committee (which is known as volunteering.)

All this community information was coming in; it comes in regularly. They have voluminous files of projects beginning; of people needing help from other people with particular skills, that don't have any money to pay for them, projects that ought to get done, but without any money again, to pay for them. So all these files began to pile up. In the course of this, I began a New Vocations project out at San Francisco State College. The Associated Students gave some funding for it. So there I was with an office, talking to people about the same sorts of things out there, again building up files of information.

Really, the People's Yellow Pages came out of how do we get that information to people in greater quantities, other than talking one to one--you ask a question, and I'll answer it by pulling something out of a file. I couldn't possibly do the thing alone, so at the job raps that the Friends had I talked about the idea of putting together a directory of all the alternatives available to people. Five of us got together and started categorizing things in an alphabetical way, and finding out what we had under each category, and that when we realized that we didn't have information for everything. I'll just open this at random. "Film": OK, American Documentary Films we all knew about. Then I saw a poster for a place called the Film School in Half Moon Bay. By

By looking at all the bulletin boards and calling the people up, you'll find out all kinds of information. Image Works in Project One; a thing called Phonebooth Films--all these people will put out a poster or a little brochure. That's the sort of thing that found its way into our file. So we just called them up and got the complete information about them and wrote them up. Pretty soon we had a book made.

Question

What did you learn, or what did you change from the first edition to the second edition?

Ms. Lustig

In the first edition we had inserted a mimeographed feedback sheet, an information sheet asking people to send in feedback on all the places they knew about that we hadn't listed. We had a 64-page book at this time. We asked for feedback on places they had contacted through the People's Yellow Pages, asking them to describe them. We got such an incredible response from that, the second book is 148 pages.

We're putting together a third book now. We're fully expecting it to go to 250 pages and we're running into terrible financial difficulties. We haven't anywhere near the money to print it, but we'll find it somewhere. Once you've put out the word to people that what they say is going to be listened to, the response is just amazing. We've got boxes full of information. The books come packed in boxes of 50, so a box is a goodly-sized box; and we've got boxes stacked in the office with the replies. The second time we had the feedback sheet printed into the middle of the book, and we've got stacks of these things, just boxes full of them that we're going through now, alphabetizing, categorizing, calling every one of the sources up. If we're not sure about the response we get on the phone, we go visit them. That's the sort of thing I was involved with this morning that kept me. So that's how the thing has grown.

We learned a little bit about how to be business people, when we tried to find funding for this thing. We tried the San Francisco Foundation. I tried the Associated Students at San Francisco State. We tried Glide Church and the American Friends Service Committee. We came very close to getting funded on a number of occassions. What stopped us from getting any funding was that the funding institution in two cases said, "It looks as though you can make a business success of this thing, and so go ahead and try. We don't have to give you money for it. We'd rather give money to something that obviously can't bring money back in." In fact, we've kept in the black. None of us has gotten paid, but it's paid for itself, and I'm pleased. In pricing the thing, if you judge the cost and figure out the price from that, it should be double the price, in a business sense. So we know that as business people, but we're going to keep the price the same for the next one which will be a lot fatter.

Comment

If you doubled the price, then you'd have your funding.

Ms. Lustig

Yes, if we doubled the price, we'd have our funding; but the people that we'd want most to reach couldn't afford to buy a copy at $3.

Comment

I think it's great. There were two very down and out men who came into the library, and they didn't have a place to sleep or anything. Your book told them where they could go for food, where to sleep, and they got jobs.

Lustig

Did they really? Oh God; I really appreciate that.

Ms. O'Donnell

Do you, when you go out to call or evaluate a place, do you tell them that you're doing it for People's Yellow Pages?

Ms. Lustig

Oh yes.

Ms. O'Donnell

Do they want to see what you write?

Ms. Lustig

We ask them to write their own listing. In most cases they will. We got very cagey. There again, what we learned from the first edition to the second: we provided a space so big, because we've had pages and pages of listings. We also say that we reserve the right to edit this copy. Mostly, once they get the idea, they're really very cooperative.

There are really two kinds of listings in the book. One is the alternative kinds of trips that people are on, what they want to get the word out about. They're the people that are most familiar with the philosophy of what we're doing. State and city agencies are a little less familiar and are a little more stand-offish. They're not quite sure that they want to be in the directory, but we want them because they provide the inexpensive services that people need--exactly the kind of thing that we're talking about. So we're very polite, and we try to get all this information. The hospitals particularly didn't want their eligibility information out. Now, that's public information.

Comment

White men would go to the Free Black Clinic because it's free.

Ms. Lustig

But there are other free clinics.

Comment

But, they don't know about them.

Ms. Lustig

Right, and the clinics themselves don't want the word out, because they're afraid they'll be flooded with people, which is what they're here for. So we try to be polite to get all the information, and I guess we've made it a policy never to say anything bad about anybody.

Question

You say that the agencies write up their own descriptions. Do you ever change that, or add to it?

Ms. Lustig

The agencies don't write their own description. The hospital agencies, the city and county agencies don't write their own descriptions. They'll give it to us over the phone. But anyone can write their own descriptions if they wish, and it's usually the counter cultural types who are doing trips that they want to advertise, who want to put it in exactly the words that they feel describes their product or service. We do respect that, because some of them have thought it through very clearly, and those words mean something to them.

Question

When is the third edition going to come out?

Ms. Lustig

We hope late spring; June we're hoping for. The thing is, we get all this information together. We type it up on long strips of paper, and then we cut them up and put them in an envelope. We've got a box of envelopes that are alphabetical according to the categories. So we've got these little envelopes with these little pieces of paper in them, and then we lay out each page. Each page requires pasting down the layout and artwork as we go along. Only myself and one other person in the collective have any experience doing artwork. The philosophy of the collective is that everybody does everything. So when Diane, for instance, decides, "Well, I'm going to do those two pages," that may take two days. Whereas, if Sandy decided to do a day's work, she might do six pages. So we never know, really, when it's going to be finished. Also, we never are sure how long the book is going to be. The second one we were able to judge by the first that we were running just a little over double the number of pages by the time we got to a particular section, but we just didn't know with this edition. We hope late Spring. We're still organizing material. We haven't begun layout yet.

Question

If some of the feedback comes from people who go to some of these places and it's bad, and if I'm in a counseling situation and I refer somebody, since you say you don't print anything bad, then how do I know if I should refer them or not?

Ms. Lustig

Well, we've gotten some bad feedback from people. In only one case did we write the listing in the second book and say, "We've had some bad feedback, but it's still an alternative institution." That was the Auto Barn at Project Artaud, which is a car--fixing place. The beginning of our auto repair section starts with caveat emptor, and we really very carefully wrote that out, but in the second editon we said, "We've had some bad feedback on that place." We still want to see it succeed.

We've had bad feedback on other places and we called them up, and we said, "Look somebody wrote in and said that you are higher-priced than you said you were in your listing; what's the story?" Depending on the story, we'll either list them or not. We may tell them at the end of the conversation, "Well, look, we think we're going to have to drop your listing." We did that with the Family Animal Clinic, which had sent in a listing saying, "Righteous prices" or something like that, and we got several bits of feedback saying, "The prices were not so righteous; they were about the same as the SPCA." People had to pay right then, and they were surprised at that. So we called them up, and they said, "Well, a lot of people came in expecting to pay nothing." At the beginning we tried to deal and bargain with them, but then they said, "This really isn't for us; we have our prices, and we have to charge them." So fine; we won't list them next time. That's the only way we can deal with them.

Question

In addition to the feedback that you get to add new things or delete things, I'd be interested in what kind of mechanism you use to keep the material you already have up-to-date. I'm in a place where we can't really use you---Santa Clara County---and there's not really enough population there to support some sort of activity like this, so I'm going to have to assemble some of these things in the library. My problem with this so far has been that I've really run into just technical problems like keeping it up to date. I was just wondering if you could give me some little technique to keep my card file up-to-date.

Ms. Lustig

Well, a card file should be a lot easier than this format. Once we've got it in here, there's nothing we can do about it, absolutely nothing until the next book. We do check all the listings. We have a mailing now about to go out to every person in the book. What we did was take a scissors and snip out every listing and put it on a mimeographed sheet which says, "This was your last listing; do you want it the same next time? If not, how do you want it changed?" That's about to go out to everybody that was in the book. About 60% will reply, so we'll have to phone the rest.

Comment

You could get a volunteer to keep your files up-to-date if you have to do all that calling.

Comment

I'm very poor at getting volunteers. I find it difficult to really attract volunteers.

Ms. Lustig

We haven't been able to work with volunteers. See, the problem of calling people during the year is eliminated for us by the fact that the book is out. People are going to these services. If they come to a door that's closed, they're going to fill in the feedback and say, "So and so is no longer there." If the service is there but no longer is doing what we say, they want us to know.

Question

I wanted to ask you about distribution. Have you had encouragement? Have you been in bookstores? Well, I've seen it in bookstores, but I wondered if you felt encouraged in any way?

Ms. Lustig

Yes, when we come out each time, the first 6 or 8 weeks we are the best seller in the bookstores. I believe we're in every bookstore in the Bay Area. Some have not taken it. Tro Harper, for instance, would not deal with us. Albert Henry threw me out but bought the books from Donna. It's really funny when you walk in with the book under your arm, and they don't know who you are; but most of the booksellers know now who we are; they know that People's Yellow Pages were the best seller for the first six weeks after we came out, and then it sold steadily for the rest of the year. We're all book delivery ladies.

Question

Have you had any left-overs?

Ms. Lustig

Maybe 100 off the first 10,000. We printed 20,000 this time, and we've still got several more months to go, and perhaps 1500 books to go. I don't think they'll be left over, because they just keep selling steadily.

Question

Is there a way we can get on your mailing list?

Ms. Lustig

There sure is.

Ms. O'Donnell

I know the South Bay did something and gave you credit. Have you heard from any other areas around Northern California?

Ms. Lustig

Northern California--I don't know. We got the Kansas City Directory. They're springing up all over the country. We, in fact, were not the first. Boston-Cambridge was the first. The title and everything came from that. When I saw that, I knew what to do with my file. New York has one. I think Portland has one, but I wouldn't swear to it. I know Vancouver has a really nice one.

Comment

There is something called People's Pages put out in Sacramento.

Ms. Lustig

Is there?

Ms. O'Donnell

That was put out by a university librarian and mimeographed.

Ms. Lustig

Who did this, a librarian?

Ms. O'Donnell

Well, a librarian and his friends at California State, Sacramento.

Comment

I'm curious to know what source of information you used to compile your column on libraries.

Ms. Lustig

You know what happened to me when we were laying this book out? Libraries is L; we got to about Health, and I was on top of it all up to that point, and right about in the middle of the Health section, everything fled my memory. I don't know what's in it at this point. You can just take so much. Well, we don't have too much, do we?

Comment

And what you have is extemeley limited. It rather gives the idea that the only thing libraries do is give out free books, which is a wonderful shock to consumers, but I hope we do more than that.

Ms. Lustig

OK, can we get a volunteer to write the library section?

Comment

There's also something about libraries under Movies and Meetings Rooms.

Ms. Lustig

Yes, I did that.

Comment

If you want to get several pages in the next issue, you might list all the Bay Area branches.

Ms. Lustig

Well, what I try to avoid doing--are they in the regular Yellow Pages? We try to avoid duplicating that information.

Question

How far is the geographical area that you cover?

Ms. Lustig

East Bay, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara. We're not sure about Santa Clara. We don't know what to do about San Jose. It's such a big area in itself. It should have its own. South Bay doesn't want to continue theirs. They want us to incorporate it into ours. Well, the printing bill goes up so high that we just aren't going to be able to do it.

Question

Where do you draw the line on what you don't accept?

Ms. Lustig

That's really difficult. I guess where we try to draw the line is at really profit-oriented people. We have no objection to making a living, and people have to charge for their services to make a living. If someone is making some really fine, high-quality handicraft, and charges a good price for it, we'll put it in if it's good quality. On the other hand, you notice we haven't listed any head shops either, which were, for awhile, the hub of the counter culture, but sold just junk. We list consignment shops where people can make things and take them in. If a plumber wants to come in and charge $5 an hour, we'll take him, because the rest of them are charging $20. Where we try to draw the line is at really profit-oriented people. That's the sort of thing that when I have doubts over the telephone, I'll go down and check to see if I can feel out where they're at. Restaurants--we'll put in restaurants that charge lots of money but serve natural food or vegetarian food. I'm not a vegetarian, but it is certainly an alternative, and we ought t put it in. So it's not necessarily the amount of money they charge, but their attitude toward what they're doing.

Ms. O'Donnell

I was wondering how you go about organizing and classifying. Librarians do it all the time, but did you have anyone with this kind of background? There are five of you, right?

Ms. Lustig

Two of us, art; one a BA in English; Jan has an MA in Urban Education; Diane has an MA in creative writing. We came together really in a very random way. I talked about this project at job raps. I took the first six people who were interested. There was no selection. The sixth person walked out in about a week. So the five of us remained. As far as our collective situation, we view this thing as an opportunity to do things we don't ordinarily do on our jobs. We all do art work, layout, information gathering, and running around distributing books, which we all hate, but we have to do it, so we do it.

Question

You mentioned that you don't make a wage from it. You do, then have outside jobs?

Ms. Lustig

Yes.

Question

So you work half time in People's Yellow Pages?

Ms. Lustig

It depends. During layout, I'll bet we'll put in--well, last time we all put in 6-8 hours a day. It often started late in the afternoon and went on until late at night. When we're doing nothing but distributing the books, I do most of that. So the others will spend maybe half a day twice a week. You call up your bookstore and say, "Are you running out?" If they are, then we go and take more. I put in about two days a week doing the distribution.

Question

How often do you check your sources? How much of your time is spent going out and calling?

Ms. Lustig

It's really hard to say. Let's see--Sandy is teaching art, and she's teaching 21 hours. So that gives you some idea of how much free time she has. Diane is the Associate Editor of [illegible] Focus, and so for two weeks when they're putting it together she does practically nothing on the People's Yellow Pages. Then she has two whole weeks that she can spend time on it.

Question

Can't you get your bookstores to tell you when they're running out and call in an order, rather than you doing it?

Ms. Lustig

They'll just run out and stay out, so you have to kind of keep after them.

Ms. O'Donnell

I hate to break this up, as there's a meeting at 4:00, and it's almost 4:00, but thank you Shirley.